

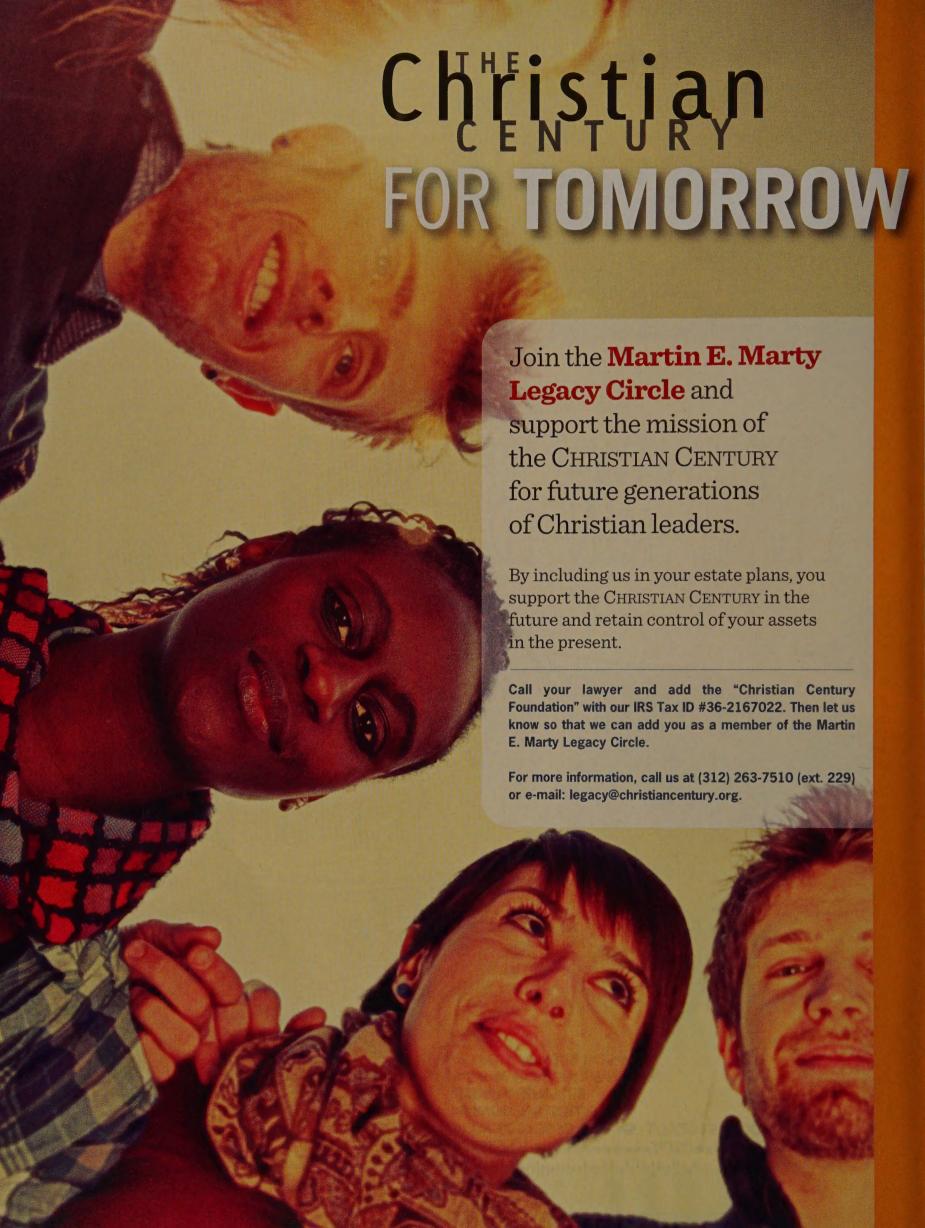
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Editor's by John M. Buchanan

A pastor's study

ONE OF THE BEST essays I've ever read on the practice of ministry is Joseph Sittler's "The Maceration of the Minister." Sittler reflects on how the seminary student is solemnly told that big concepts like the kingdom of God (basileia tou theou) demand a lifetime of study and reflection. But then the student becomes a pastor. Sittler's description of the transition still makes me laugh out loud:

Visit the [former student] years later in what he inexactly calls the "study" and one is more than likely to find ... a roll of blueprints; a file of negotiations between the parish, the bank and the Board of Missions; samples of asphalt tile, a plumber's estimate.

The pithy paragraph came to mind almost every day of my final year of ministry because our congregation was moving through a major building project. I even had my own hard hat with my name on it, and I'd look at it sitting on my bookshelf and ruefully remember Sittler's words.

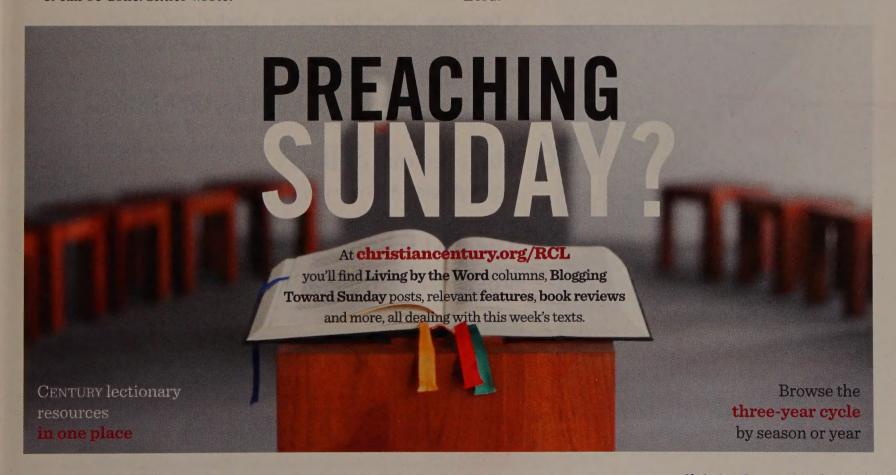
Many of us love the busyness, energy, and creative dynamism of a robust church. Many of us love the program direction and even the management. And yet all of us pastors must summon an uncommon discipline if we are to reflect the priority and importance of preaching.

It can be done. Sittler wrote:

It [the congregation] is likely to accept, support and be deeply molded by the understanding of Office and calling which is projected by its minister's actual behavior. It will come to assess as central what he, in his actual performance of ministry and use of his time, makes central.

The preacher, Sittler concluded, must order her or his time around study, reflection, and sermon preparation. I discovered that the congregation appreciates knowing that the minister takes preaching seriously. The practice I developed—and it's not unique or original-was to block off segments of time throughout the week for reading, study, and sermon preparation and to be strict about never infringing on them. I learned the hard way that sermons not grounded in a significant investment of time were not very good.

At first I felt guilty about affording myself the luxury of uninterrupted time. But I came to understand that this was what the church's members called me to do, were willing to pay me to do. I told the personnel committee and church leaders about the time I devoted to preparing sermons and was delighted to have their understanding and support of my attempt to honor those who invest a morning of their busy lives in coming to church and listening to what the preacher says, always hopeful that it will contain a word from the Lord.



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Learning together

haron Ely Pearson's article on Sunday school is so true on so many levels ("What reaches children?" Feb. 19). It is so interesting that those teachers using Godly Play find that their own spirituality, as well as the child's, is nurtured. Surely this is part of the answer—to find curricula and training that make teachers feel that they are part of something so worthwhile and faith-forming for both themselves and those they teach that they cannot wait for Sunday morning to arrive.

Glenys Nellist christiancentury.org comment

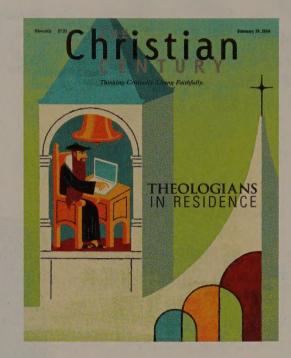
have been a director of Christian edu-Leation in the United Methodist Church for over 25 years, and Godly Play is the best answer I've found to helping children of all ages grow spiritually as they experience the stories of our faith and respond in ways that are relevant to their lives. Godly Play also helps in learning the traditions of our faith community, and children experience what it means to be a part of a community that loves and cares for all people. Leaders are fellow learners. It is truly a spiritual growth experience for all. Many of my "closest to Christ" experiences have been during Godly Play training events and exploring the stories with children.

Carol Ann Weston christiancentury.org comment

Pearson's article mirrored my experience. A big piece here seems to be that parents and other adults do not seem to value faith formation or see it as integral to a child's growth. Church leadership, for the most part, falls right in line. Many parishes are not clear about their mission, and so aren't sure what to teach. If an adult cannot articulate a personal theology, then how can they lead children?

Caroline Jordan Black christiancentury.org comment

We have a problem when congregations think that Christian education or faith formation is something for



children. It wasn't until the final paragraph that Pearson talked of faith development at every age. Until children see their parents' commitment to their own faith development, Sunday school will seem like an obligation on a day when everyone would rather sleep in.

Debbie Katz christiancentury.org comment

A community of theologians . . .

I agree with Allan Janssen's comment (in Lawrence Wood's "Theologians in place," Feb. 19) that "a theologian thinks about God," and that all baptized Christians are called to do this, thus each is indeed a theologian. With this understanding the term resident theologian proves difficult when applied to anyone in particular, but especially when you consider the pastor(s) of a congregation.

I was once interviewed for a call and was asked how I thought of myself. I replied I would consider myself the "chief theologian" of the congregation. This puzzled a few of the panel, but I explained, following Janssen, that all the members were called to be theologians. I simply had the particular vocation, based on my seminary training, of being the one charged with

helping everyone else be the best at their baptismal vocation. And congratulations to those communities who have the resources, the commitment, and the wisdom to invite someone, no matter what title they may be given, to be about the discipline of theological thinking for the good of the whole.

Glen Bengson Powell, Ohio

Theological transformation . . .

Thanks for the timely editorial on seminary education ("Innovative moment," Feb. 19). Medical schools and postgraduate medical education (on the job training) at their best might offer a model for seminary education. The danger of compartmentalized thinking—learning and praxis—is quite real in both ministry and medicine.

In the same issue, L. Gregory Jones ("Something old, something new") points out the danger of resorting to what are survival-mode practices in the face of certain death, especially if theological education does not change in meaningful ways. Those who are well versed and open to change will hopefully be heard from soon.

Bill Holmes Louisville, Ky.

Applying atonement . . .

It is refreshing to read a commentary on the atonement theory that delineates concrete social and ethical ramifications for our violence-ridden world (Christopher P. Momany's "Affirmation of being," Feb. 5). Too often the atonement theory is merely regurgitated as a doctrine to be accepted in an attempt to highlight the narcissistic benefits (acceptance into heaven), all the while exacerbating the rift among people of various religious backgrounds.

Sam Hwang christiancentury.org comment

Christian

March 19, 2014

Wages to spend

or the first time since 2007, Washington is talking seriously about increasing the federal minimum wage. President Obama favors \$10.10 an hour, and the Congressional Budget Office recently crunched the numbers. The results gave ammunition to the ayes and nays alike: such an increase would likely raise wages for 16.5 million Americans, but at the expense of 500,000 jobs.

Half a million lost jobs is no small thing. But change comes with costs, and here the benefits are far greater. Along with the 16.5 million workers that a \$10.10 minimum wage would help directly, the CBO estimates that another 8 million would reap a spillover effect on wages. Overall, the change would improve the family incomes of more than 70 percent of low-wage workers and nudge 900,000 Americans above the poverty line. There's little question that increasing the minimum wage would benefit low-income Americans.

Would this come at the direct expense of the well off? Yes and no. A minimum wage hike could affect consumer prices and higher-wage earnings; as a direct intervention against wage inequality, it will be felt by people on either side of the inequality coin. But it won't hurt much. The CBO found that families earning \$180,000 would see their incomes fall by less than half a percent. And an independent study found that if Walmart paid all employees at least \$12 an hour and passed the entire cost on to consumers, prices would go up only 1 percent.

This is likely one reason Walmart has suggested it might support a minimum wage increase, as it did in 2007. Another is that paying well is good for business. GAP recently voluntarily upped its own minimum wage, joining Costco and others. GAP's CEO Glenn Murphy characterized this as an investment expected "to deliver a return many times over"—because these days, the main thing brick-and-mortar stores offer is hands-on service. Such service requires skilled, motivated employees who stick around. Higher pay promotes this.

A Walmart spokesperson added another reason higher wages are good for business: low-income Americans compose not just the retailer's workforce but also its customers. In the past, Walmart has often been contrasted with Henry

Ford, who paid autoworkers enough to buy the cars they made. Now Walmart is inviting a comparison: the company employs 1 percent of its 140 million customers—and if they have more money, they shop more.

Paying good wages is good for business.

But unlike Ford then and GAP now, Walmart isn't willing to increase wages on its own. It wants the government to do it so that competing retailers have to pay more, too. While this perhaps reveals the limits of Walmart's imagination, it also highlights something crucial: higher wages can be good for everyone—retailers of different sizes, workers and managers alike—provided the playing field is level. The minimum wage is not a zero-sum game.

It's not the whole answer, either. Lifting 900,000 Americans out of poverty leaves 50 times that many behind. The fight for a fairer, more humane society has many fronts. But raising the minimum wage is a good step and long overdue.

marks

ONE GOD: The Central African Republic is being torn apart by strife between Muslims and Christians. A Catholic church in one small town has taken in about 650 Muslims who are seeking sanctuary from Christian marauders. Father Xavier Fagba, the priest at the church, knows that some Muslims hiding in his church attacked Christian families in the past year. The priest is determined to keep providing sanctuary because "the Muslims discovered in our church that the God we worship is the same as their God. And that's the vision the whole of this country needs to have," the priest said (BBC, February 13).

GET-WELL GREETING: President Hassan Rouhani of Iran had his brother hand deliver a check for \$400,000 last month to Tehran's only Jewish hospital

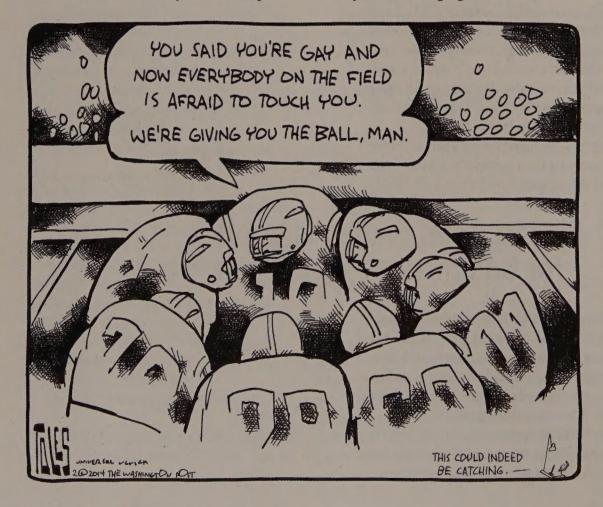
with the message that "our government intends to unite all ethnic groups and religions, so we decided to assist you." In September Rouhani's administration had issued a Rosh Hashanah greeting to Jews around the world. Though some question Rouhani's motives, his behavior is a refreshing contrast to that of President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, who is a Holocaust denier (*New York Times*, February 6).

LOCATION, LOCATION: The purchase of a \$3.6 million condo in Beacon Hill to house the rector of Boston's Trinity Church has caused consternation among some members of this landmark Episcopal congregation. Some members claim that it reinforces the congregation's reputation as a place for the elite. Others say it is a betrayal of the congregation's commit-

ment to the poor in the city. Congregational leaders say a place was needed for the rector within walking distance of the church and that nothing reasonable can be purchased in the neighborhood. The purchase of the condo, which used funds from Trinity's \$30 million endowment, didn't affect the operating budget of the church or its substantial ministries to the poor and homeless (*Boston Globe*, February 14).

DUMPSTER DIVING: Most of New York City's trash is found in bags on the curbside, so trash is up for grabs until it's hauled away. Foraging in trash bags has taken off in some New York circles with organizations such as Food Not Bombs, a group of volunteers that retrieves vegan or vegetarian food to share with the public. The Food Not Bombs website lists 500 chapters. "With over a billion people going hungry each day how can we spend another dollar on war?" the group's mission statement asks. Dumpster diving generally attracts educated white people in their twenties and thirties; typically, they are people who do it by choice rather than need (RNS).

CACHE OF CASH: If you've never heard of Sean Noble, you are not alone. A former staff person for a little-known U.S. congressman from Arizona, Noble disbursed millions of dollars of so-called dark money from unknown donors to conservative political causes during the 2010 and 2012 elections. In 2012 alone Noble, a Mormon, handed out nearly \$137 million, much of it going to support Mitt Romney. Working at the behest of the billionaire Koch brothers, known for their libertarian activism, Noble operated out of an organization called the Center to Protect Patient Rights. As a social welfare nonprofit, the organization didn't have to disclose its donors. That information is disclosed



only with tax returns that are submitted long after the elections are held (ProPublica, February 14).

BLAME THE VICTIMS? Sexual assault isn't unique to Patrick Henry College, an evangelical school known for grooming graduates to work in conservative organizations or for the FBI, the CIA, and the National Security Agency. It is one of four colleges in the country that don't accept any federal funding, which frees them from government regulations about reporting campus crimes and disciplining students for sexual assault. Several women who were sexually assaulted at Patrick Henry claim the college didn't take their stories seriously, blamed them for the incidents, and let the men off easy. Patrick Henry denies the allegations and claims it has disciplinary procedures in place for such cases (New Republic, February 17).

ALONE AND LONELY: A study of people age 50 and older in the United Kingdom found that those who were lonely had a 14 percent greater risk of dving during the six-year study. Feelings of isolation can have twice the impact on health as does obesity on aging people. Previous studies have shown that loneliness in older people can lead to high blood pressure, a weakened immune system, depression, heart attack, and stroke. Retirees should think twice before picking up stakes and moving to a new area for retirement if that means giving up a social support system. People need to feel valued and be involved in life. The research indicated, however, that some people actually prefer solitude (Guardian, February 16).

HOME IN NINEVAH? There is a movement afoot in Iraq to establish a province in the Ninevah plains, which would give some autonomy to the Iraqi Christians who live there. Christians in that region make up about 40 percent of the population in the proposed province. Some Christians are skeptical. One former member of the Kurdistan Parliament thinks it is a political ploy to get votes in the upcoming Iraq elections. Sunnis also have their eye on the region, hoping to establish an autonomous province that would protect them from strife with the dominant

66 Who is at fault? All of us are. We are all sinners. There is only one who is right, and that is our Lord. ??

> - Pope Francis, in an informal message recorded on an iPhone, urging Christian unity

66 We cannot protect our children because racism in America is not merely a belief system but a heritage, and the inability of black parents to protect their children is an ancient tradition. ??

> - Writer Ta-Nehisi Coates, writing about the Florida trial of Michael Dunn, who shot and killed Jordan Davis, a young black male. The jury, which deadlocked on a first-degree murder charge, convicted Dunn of second-degree attempted murder (Atlantic, February 15).

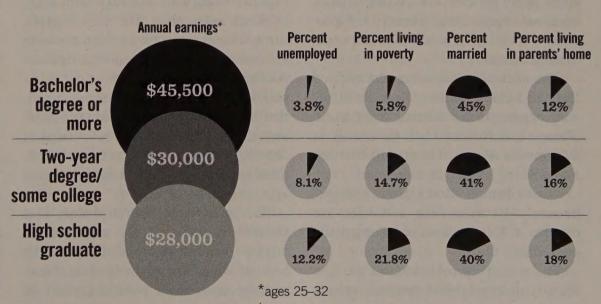
Shiites. According to the Chaldean Church, six Christian families leave Iraq every day because of the violence and slim job prospects (Rudaw, January 24).

NAME THAT TUNE: At least half of churchgoers in the United Kingdom claim they've heard their church organist occasionally slip in unexpected tunes, from popular songs to advertising jingles and theme songs from TV programs or movies. Sometimes organists are motivated by playfulness, other times revenge. One organist played "Money, Money, Money" by Abba while the offering was taken. Another played "Roll Out the Barrel" at a funeral for a man known for his drinking. (The organist got sacked for this transgression.) An organist in Scotland at odds with the elders played a thinly disguised version of "Send in the

Clowns" during the procession in a worship service (Telegraph, May 3, 2013).

SNAKEBITTEN: Jamie Coots was a Kentucky preacher who took Jesus literally when he said that he gave his disciples the power to tread on snakes and scorpions and that nothing would hurt them (Luke 10:19). Coots's son Cody thinks his father was bitten about eight times. He would always refuse treatment or hospitalization, go home in pain, pray, and eventually pull through. But last month Coots was bitten by a rattlesnake in a church service and died. Coots was an outspoken critic of a Kentucky law that forbids handling snakes in church services. The local police chief thinks the law violates free speech rights, so he won't enforce it unless other people are endangered (Los Angeles Times, February 16).

MILLENNIALS* IN PROFILE SOURCE: PEW RESEARCH CENTER



^{*}Median among full-time workers in 2012 dollars

The homebrew movement goes to church

Faith, hops, and love

by Jesse James DeConto

GEOFF LOSEE'S homemade beer bears a label with an icon of his Episcopal parish's patron saint, Paul the apostle, encircled with "God's Peace, Happy Yeast." His congregation was one of several that competed in the What Would Jesus Brew? contest in Wilmington, North Carolina, over the past two years.

"The whiskeypalians went 1-2," Losee said after his smoked barley porter, Thurifer's Choice, won second place at the contest this past fall.

Jeffrey Hughes, another member of the Brew Unto Others team from St. Paul's Episcopal Church in Wilmington, won first place for his Dubbel Indulgences, a classic Belgian brewed with black plums, granola, and maple syrup to enhance the smooth, robust flavors. "This is what the monks made," Losee said of the concoction.

While medieval monastics did not invent beer, they did revolutionize the brewing process with refined recipes, sanitary strictness, and the introduction of hops as a preservative, which would become a key flavoring. The monks could apply the Benedictine rule of work to God's agricultural bounty and produce something of value for the people around them.

The work of monastic brewers inspired the third-place winner, Rob Smeaton, who organized the hosting team at St. Therese's, a Roman Catholic church in Wrightsville Beach. He started brewing after visiting Europe as a student.

"I was drinking Bud Light in college," he said. "Because beer and wine are cheaper in Europe, I was drinking really good stuff."

The rise of microbrewing in the 21st century has renewed interest among

Christians in the church-related brewing heritage. Beer & Hymns and Theology on Tap events are bubbling up across the United States, bringing worship and Bible study into local taverns. In local parishes homebrew clubs have formed for fun and fellowship. They're also extending the monks' tradition of hospitality by offering a meeting place for non-Christians.

"It's a way to introduce Christ or Christian community without the churchiness getting in the way," said Dena Bearl, rector of St. Paul's.

Despite Losee's joke about "whiskeypalians," brew club participants recognize the hazards of promoting alcohol the same when hosting one another in their homes.

orking out of the St. Paul's congregation, Hughes helped to organize the area's first congregation-based brewing competition in 2012. One of his aims is to change the perception that people have of Christians as judgmental and unable to have any fun—a perception he encounters a lot among the people he works with in Wilmington's "Hollywood East" film industry, which produces hit films such as *Iron Man 3*.

Instead of rejecting beer altogether because of alcohol's potential to create

The monastic tradition of making beer is inspiring new commercial and amateur brewers.

while simultaneously ministering to alcoholics, as well as to youth who might be experimenting with underage drinking.

Bearl noted that, like most pastors, she ministers to people in recovery from alcoholism. St. Paul's is starting an Alcoholics Anonymous meeting in its building. "I don't know any alcoholics that have said nobody should ever drink and alcohol should never be present at church," Bearl said. "I don't sense from them any discomfort with moderate and appropriate use of alcohol."

She insists that church events that include alcohol also offer nonalcoholic drinks—ones with as much flavor as the beer or wine that might be available—and she encourages parishioners to do

dependency, Hughes and others see gatherings such as What Would Jesus Brew? as celebrating the earth's abundance and encouraging creativity.

"This is not an activity that encourages the abuse of alcohol, but one that is about creating something you'd be proud to say you made," said J. D. Brown, who started homebrewing classes as part of a young men's ministry at Holy Trinity Episcopal Church in Garland, Texas. "The friendships that result in the process strengthen the community—

Jesse James DeConto is a writer and musician in Durham, North Carolina. He is author of the spiritual memoir This Littler Light: Some Thoughts on NOT Changing the World. which is the body of Christ." Brown said he has not seen anyone overindulge at a church event.

Each fall Holy Trinity's men's group, a chapter of the international Brotherhood of St. Andrew, hosts an Oktoberfest to raise money for youth mission trips. An annual homebrew contest happens alongside a pig roast, face painting, a children's bounce house, and a cake walk.

"It is a family event," Brown said. "Members of the congregation invite friends and family to join us, which actually is in keeping with the invitational tradition of St. Andrew, who invited his brother Peter to come and meet our Lord. . . . We card everyone and only pour out a taste in a plastic punch glass so that we meter consumption.

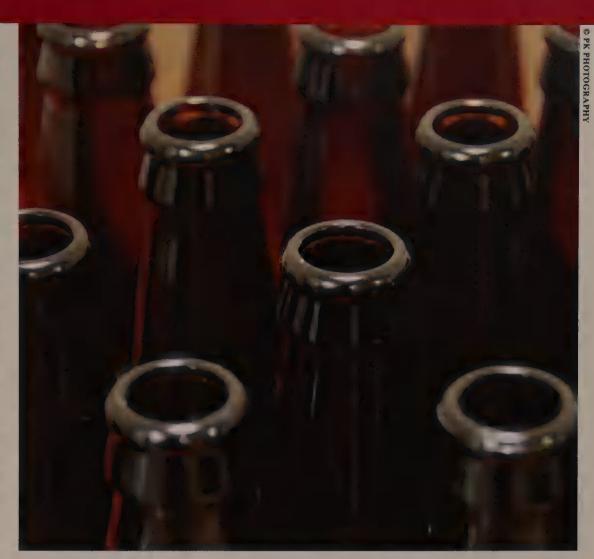
"It is a very nonthreatening way to get someone into the building," he said. "Conversations are started, relationships built, and pretty soon you earn the right to have a deeper conversation with those who attend."

Brewing and sharing beer as a form of fellowship can also be a way to spark conversations about moderation. Kevin Hay, a Presbyterian campus minister at the University of North Carolina at Wilmington, does not drink his homebrews with his students, but he does not hide his hobby, either.

"I try to encourage responsibility by being open to talking about alcohol rather than treating it like a forbidden fruit," he said.

nderson Campbell, who works with online education at George Fox Evangelical Seminary in Portland, Oregon, is writing a book about brewing and spirituality. He sees beer as a metaphor for a common life that honors each individual. The uniqueness of each ingredient and its source—such as the specific mineral makeup of regional water supplies—influences the end product, just as individual stories change the identity of a congregation.

"I can honor the story of the water and choose to brew ales that are well suited to the water profile for my region, or I can chemically alter the water by adding things to it or removing things from it," Campbell wrote on the Patheos blog.



Last summer, the 35th annual National Homebrewers Conference included a service at Philadelphia's First Unitarian Church and celebrated beer as promoting "conviviality and equality among all people."

Church beer is also big business. Since 2006, Benedictine Monastery of Christ in the Desert in New Mexico has been operating the Abbey Beverage Company, brewing Belgian and German-style ales under the Monks Ale label. The brothers grow their own hops on site for their Kolsch, American Pale, and Dubbel and Tripel Reserve ales. The monks made almost 15,000 cases in 2012-worth hundreds of thousands of dollars in revenue-with a capacity to brew twice that much. In January, St. Joseph's Abbey in Spencer, Massachusetts, the first certified Trappist brewery outside of Europe, began distributing Spencer Trappist Ale locally, with plans to make it available nationally.

Bigger breweries are also capitalizing on the abbey craze. Sierra Nevada brewery in California collaborates with the brothers at the nearby New Clairvaux monastery to make its Belgian ale series, Ovila, named for Spain's Cistercian abbey Santa Maria de Ovila.

Jeff Guidos is part of a renaissance of microbrewing centered on St. Vincent Archabbey in Latrobe, Pennsylvania. Rolling Rock was brewed in Latrobe until 2006, when Anheuser-Busch bought the brand and moved production to New Jersey. A Catholic who studied chemistry at St. Vincent College, Guidos said the Benedictine brewers who settled in the area knew what they were doing. "They picked Latrobe because of the land and the water to grow their barley," he said.

At his All Saints Brewing Company in nearby Greensburg, Guidos makes beers such as the Heavy Weizen, a dark German wheat or Weizenbock-style ale.

"Bockbiers were brewed by monks for fortification during times of fasting," according to the All Saints website.

Sean Wilson, a Christian and a graduate of Wheaton College in Illinois, has built Fullsteam Brewery in Durham, North Carolina, into one of the city's central social spaces. He's not overtly Christian on his mission, but he says, "I do look at what we do with a quiet mission: to bring people together in the spirit of community and fellowship."

What's left when a church closes

Holy stuff

by L. Gail Irwin

THE DAY I visited Lucille to hear the story of how her church had closed, she started talking before I could even turn on my voice recorder. "We don't know what all happened at the end," she said. "We were never told where the stuff in the church went to—the pews and cross and things. Maybe they're still in the building!" The not knowing had kept Lucille in a state of suspended grief—something like the way parents feel when they cannot locate the bodies of dead children. She refused to drive the main street through her hometown, where the church now stands empty. "I can't go back there," she said.

Some churches meet in coffee shops; some make use of a "church in a box" kit they set up in school auditoriums. In most settings, however, people of faith still cling fondly, even fiercely, to the dedicated physical space that links them to their faith tradition. A church building—with its windows depicting biblical scenes, its 1950s Sunday school posters, and even the silver set once used for the women's

guild tea—may prompt visceral responses in the hearts of the faithful.

"The church is not a building," says the old Avery and Marsh song. "The church is a people." But that's the church universal; the church institutional is another matter. It is, in fact, a building—with walls, a basement, and the accoutrements accumulated over decades of rummage sales and Christmas pageants. As much as we imagine the church as a dream in the mind of God, that dream has been made manifest in our world with cement blocks painted aquamarine and a layer of asbestos in the floor.

Amid a cyclone of cultural change, churches that ten years ago were getting by on a shoestring budget with a hundred members are now merging or closing altogether, taking the last steadfast souls on a pilgrimage to new places of worship. These churches leave behind a trail of polished artifacts of their faith—with no clear guidelines about how to disperse or dispose of them.

After the decision was made to close Lucille's church, members gathered to claim any objects their families had given. Lucille didn't know of anything from her family, but there was a painting she dearly loved, a copy of Warner Sallman's *Christ at Heart's Door*. She asked shyly, "Did anyone give that painting?" When no one claimed it, she said, "Pastor, I want that." It now hangs in her living room. Her eyes filled with tears as she showed it to me and told how she had acquired it.

t another church, Pastor Mark guided his congregation through four years of discussion about its decline. The members finally decided to close and have their building demolished because of disrepair. To deal with his own grief, Mark conducted an inventory of the church's contents, strolling alone through the building and snapping photographs of each object. Along the way, he took a picture of a particular spot on the chancel floor he had often gazed at during his prayer time in worship. "I wanted a photo of that view," he told me.

On a visit to a gourmet pizza restaurant housed in a former church, I noticed that the old pews were used as seats. There used to be one additional pew located by the entrance, where patrons could sit while they sipped beer and waited for tables. A server told me that a few months after the restaurant opened, a man entered the restaurant, marched over to the pew by the door, hoisted it off the floor, and announced: "This is my pew." He left the building with it. "Now there's no place for people to sit when they're waiting," she shrugged.

In some cases, the anxious clinging that accompanies a decision to close a church eventually gives way to a more

Imposition

This soot-dark smear across the brow, between the eyes, will lead you, if the way be clear, through all the endless winter of our year, toward an elemental table, the tears and savage hubbub of that agonizing garden, the treacherous courtyard, hilltop, nails and spear, the cry, the dark descending fear, and then another garden with a cave and such an austere emptiness will fill the rest of history with clear resounding alleluias.

J. Barrie Shepherd

creative generosity. Mark's parishioners wanted to do something to celebrate 90 years of ministry, so they built a moveable stained glass panel they could carry with them wherever they eventually moved. Mark likened it to the Ark of the Covenant.

Some churches hold an auction to disperse those objects that lack sacred meaning. But at one tiny rural church, the members were emotionally connected even to their pots and pans. When the time came to disperse these small items. the 14 members held a meeting. Someone suggested they give each item to whoever was willing to tell a story about why it was meaningful to them. The pastor asked the group what would happen if two people told equally great stories about the same object. There was a silence, until one women said, "Then we'll have to tell more stories!" The last event the church celebrated together featured the giving away of the objects and the telling of sacred stories.

I once attended an open house in the basement of a church that had closed and become a business office. The redesigned space preserved many of the church's original architectural features, including its resplendent stained glass. I happened to be standing with one of the former church members, a woman who had been embittered by the closure, as she saw for the first time the way the church's pews had been repurposed as bookshelves. As she stared at the shelves long and hard, something in her face gradually softened.

In A Struggle for Holy Ground, Michael Weldon documents the way that Roman Catholic rituals can help parishioners address their sense of loss after a church consolidation, preventing the prolonged grief that results when believers are separated from their holy places. In the liturgy of deconsecration, sacred objects are ritually washed and lifted out of their former settings in much the same way we strip the altar on Maundy Thursday. A funeral is held for the local church, and its physical form is tended to

as carefully as are the bodies of our loved ones.

Protestants claim not to rely on rosaries and relics. We may think that we are above this attachment to holy objects or that grief over their loss is a form of idolatry. Many contemporary Christians define faith in more nomadic terms and do not experience the trauma of spiritual dislocation when asked to leave a church building behind. Still, we are wise to pay attention to the sense of separation that some experience when churches are closed. These places and their objects are brimming with memories and meaning. Amid a sea change, they give people spiritual anchors.

One church I served was born in the flurry of 1960s suburban optimism. It managed to raise a new generation of faithful Christians, but then it began an irreversible decline. In its rush to become a "program church," it had never furnished the sanctuary with a baptismal font. The church had only a tiny, borrowed silver bowl used for sprinkling the brows of new Christians.

The lack of a font troubled me. I sometimes wondered if, by omitting this central symbol from the sanctuary, the church had cast a spell on its future, making it impossible for new generations to continue the church's ministry. I finally arranged on my own to have an artist craft a font and stand. Part of me saw the font as a talisman that might revive us in the 11th hour. Maybe if we showed God that we really wanted to experience new life by the waters of baptism, God would spare us our impending death.

It wasn't to be. Shortly after the font was consecrated, I left that church. A year later it closed its doors.

Last summer, my teenage daughter and I visited another church in the same city. As we were listening to the sermon, my daughter—one of the few children I had baptized in the old church—leaned over and whispered, "Mom, isn't that our baptismal font?" I peered up at the chancel, and there it was, now perched on a new stand, in a place of honor and shimmering with bittersweet glory.

Fear

Of all wild things the sparrow unkempt body, claws like little commas those ridiculously tiny bones that brash bird-chirp

is most to be noted for industrious foraging effortless flitting morning to nightfall bush to bush.

Sparrows are sold two for a penny in the temple we are told how easily and frequently they fall though never unseen.

Of all qualities to fear the endearing fearlessness of a dun-feathered sassy sparrow is, when you think of it, most terrifying

Sarah Klassen

L. Gail Irwin is an interim minister in Wisconsin and the author of Toward the Better Country: Church Closure and Resurrection (Wipf & Stock).

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Sources include:
Religion News Service (RNS)
USA Today, other newspapers
Associated Baptist Press (ABP)
denominational news services

Pope's words twisted, says cardinal

s Pope Francis led the world's cardinals at talks in Rome, a senior American cardinal took to the pages of the Vatican newspaper to reassure conservatives that Francis remains opposed to abortion and gay marriage.

Cardinal Raymond Burke acknowledged that the pope has said the church "cannot insist only on issues related to abortion, gay marriage, and the use of contraceptive methods." But in a toughly worded column in *L'Osservatore Romano* on February 21, the former archbishop of St. Louis blasted those "whose hearts are hardened against the truth" for trying to twist Francis's words to their own ends.

Burke, an outspoken conservative who has headed the Vatican's highest court since 2008, said Francis in fact strongly backs the church's teaching on those topics. He said the pope is simply trying to find ways to convince people to hear the church's message despite "galloping de-Christianization in the West."

Burke added that the "false praise" from those who highlight Francis's shift in tone and practice actually "mocks" his role as pope. Francis, the cardinal said, trusts God alone and "rejects the acceptance and praise of the world."

The American cardinal said he was prompted to write his column after a recent visit to the United States in which he became alarmed that so many people wanted to know whether the pope's statements about not judging gays and his stress on mercy and welcoming everyone augured a change in church doctrine.

Burke has a long-standing reputation as one of the church's most vocal hard-liners, with his broadsides on abortion and gay marriage even targeting his fellow American bishops. When Francis last year dropped Burke from an influential Vatican body that helps pick new bishops, it was seen as a significant shift in the church's political dynamic.

Burke's piece in the pages of the Vatican's own semiofficial newspaper is an indicator of conservatives' unease that their priorities are viewed as out of favor. Burke wrote that Francis's new approach "cannot change the duty of the Church and her shepherds to teach

clearly and insistently about the most fundamental moral questions of our time."

At another point, he said that what Francis has called a "new balance" in the church's approach does not require anyone to be "silent" about sexual morality; he argued that those issues must remain central to the church's message.

In another sign of conservative unease, Sandro Magister, an Italian journalist who often channels the views of the Vatican old guard, wrote a column February 21 that pointedly questioned "the risks of the strategy of silence" that



WEIGHING IN: Cardinal Raymond Burke, an influential American conservative who has worked in the Roman Curia since 2008, wrote in the semiofficial Vatican newspaper that Pope Francis remains opposed to abortion and gay marriage. Francis has suggested that some bishops are preoccupied with these issues. Burke declared that the "false praise" from those who highlight Francis's shift in tone actually "mocks" his role as pope.

Francis is following by not speaking out on issues like the child euthanasia law recently passed in Belgium.

"He never proclaims Church teaching out loud at a moment when the dispute over an issue has become heated," Magister wrote.

But that seems to be the way Francis wants it.

As he opened the second of two days of meetings with the world's cardinals, Francis went out of his way to praise the February 20 talk by German Cardinal Walter Kasper, who is a leader in pushing the church to carve out more space for Catholics who, for example, have divorced and remarried outside the church.

Those Catholics currently cannot receive communion, and how to welcome them was a major topic of these closed-door talks among the 150 cardinals. They were joined by nearly 20 bishops who were made cardinals on February 22 by Francis in St. Peter's Basilica.

The pope summoned the cardinals to Rome a few days early so that they could discuss a range of challenges on family life, such as cohabitation, contraception, and same-sex marriage.

Commenting on the lengthy introductory talk by Kasper—who had often been a theological sparring partner with Francis's predecessor, the more conservative Pope Benedict XVI—Francis praised Kasper's "profound" and "serene" theology.

According to the Vatican's chief spokesman, Federico Lombardi, the subsequent private discussions among the cardinals ranged over many topics and included suggestions for "improving and simplifying" the process for getting an annulment.

Lombardi repeatedly stressed that the talks were not aimed at crafting proposals but were part of a two-year process of "discernment" as the church looks for "a better way" to deal with the complex issues of modern family life.

Francis will convene a major meeting of many of the world's bishops, called a synod, this October and in the fall of 2015 to come up with more concrete proposals that the pope can then accept or modify. —David Gibson, RNS

Cozy up to capitalism? Dalai Lama demurs

Some of the brightest pro-business minds in the nation recently prodded the Dalai Lama in Washington, D.C., to offer a warm endorsement of capitalism.

But during an appearance on February 20 by the spiritual leader of Tibetan Buddhism at the American Enterprise Institute, one of the world's most stalwart and, in conservative circles, respected free enterprise think tanks, they came up short.

The Dalai Lama was the star participant in a morning of panels on "moral free enterprise" and "human happiness."

Asked by AEI president Arthur Brooks and Columbia Business School dean Glenn Hubbard whether he agrees that the free enterprise system is the most moral of economic systems and why he thinks the United States is the richest nation on earth, the Dalai Lama answered in broken English with his own question: What do you mean by rich?

He went on to declare the communist economy of the former Soviet Union "failed" and then critiqued American capitalism: "At the same time, United States, capitalist country, most richest, but gap rich and poor."

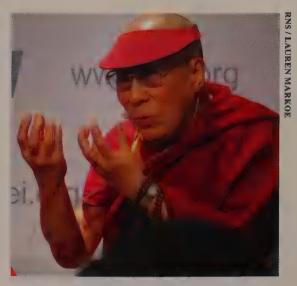
Both systems, he continued, have "drawbacks," and he prescribed "more discussions, more concern for others' well-being."

Then finally, the Dalai Lama said, "I myself don't know," and burst into laughter, adding, "unless I spend few years studying about world economies and become student of you."

In his opening remarks to a rapt audience of several hundred, the Dalai Lama did underscore a value that many conservatives believe is in short supply: individual responsibility.

He said the next century, unlike the last, should be one of peace. "We must create it.... Peace only comes through our action, not through wishful thinking," the Dalai Lama said. "Buddha cannot give you what you want. You must make effort."

Brooks—who was joined on the first panel by Hubbard, hedge fund founder



TOO MUCH GREED: The Dalai Lama, the spiritual leader of Tibetan Buddhism, speaks to the American Enterprise Institute on February 20 in Washington, D.C. The think tank, which advocates for the strengthening of free-market capitalism, asked the Dalai Lama to participate in discussions on "Economics, Happiness, and the Search for a Better Life."

Daniel S. Loeb, and New York University business and ethics professor Jonathan Haidt—also asked the Dalai Lama how nations could best protect private property and how the poor could enjoy "the blessings of the free enterprise system."

The Dalai Lama answered in general terms, repeating his call for human beings to be more compassionate and to dampen "too much greed."

In the past, the Dalai Lama has called himself a Marxist. He has also previously praised the freedoms that opening markets has brought to China, whose leadership tried to assassinate him in 1959 for his work to free Tibetans from Chinese domination.

Believed by Tibetan Buddhists to be the 14th Dalai Lama, Tenzin Gyatso was born in a poor Tibetan village and has lived most of his 78 years in exile in India, where until three years ago he was head of the Tibetan government in exile. Since the communist invasion in 1950, China has ruled Tibet.

As Haidt noted, the Dalai Lama is greatly admired by those on the left side of the political spectrum. But the professor said he hoped the AEI event would help to "break out of the rut" of opposing narratives of the free enterprise system—one in which it is the savior of

humanity, lifting the poor out of poverty and promoting liberty, and the other in which it is the oppressor of the worker and the ruination of the environment.

The Dalai Lama, Haidt said, could help write a third, more "nuanced" story of capitalism, where all get to share in its bounty.

But Robert Thurman, a scholar of Tibetan Buddhism at Columbia University, said the Dalai Lama isn't following anybody's script. A Buddhist and supporter of the Occupy Wall Street movement, Thurman said he's not nervous about those who might like to align themselves with the Dalai Lama to burnish their own reputations.

The Dalai Lama likes to talk to people you might not expect him to, Thurman said. He will engage with the downtrodden and leaders alike. He believes "the best kind of change comes from both ends."—Lauren Markoe, RNS

Presbyterian booklet attacks Zionism

Major Jewish civil rights groups are denouncing a new publication distributed by the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) that rejects the existence of Israel as a Jewish state.

Zionism Unsettled, a study guide for congregations published in January by the Israel/Palestine Mission Network, a group chartered by the church, writes of the "pathology" of Zionism, the movement undergirding the founding of Israel as a Jewish homeland.

The booklet describes Zionism as inherently discriminatory toward non-Jews. It calls on Christians to see the conflict through the lens of Palestinian Christians who have declared Zionism "heretical" and "a doctrine that promotes death rather than life."

"The fundamental assumption of this study is that no exceptionalist claims can be justified in our interconnected, pluralistic world," the booklet states.

But Jewish groups say that in its accusations about Israeli "exceptionalism" the booklet seeks to mask its authors' own bigotry.

"This publication is not an attack on

particular Israeli policies but on the very idea of a Jewish return to Zion," said Abraham Cooper of the Simon Wiesenthal Center. The church, he added, "has deployed the nuclear option against the vast majority of Jews, calling us inherently racist and abusive. We call on our Christian associates—including those critical of some of Israel's policies—to denounce this disgusting attack aimed at delegitimizing and demonizing the world's largest Jewish community and all lovers of Zion."

The booklet recounts in detail the Israeli occupation of Palestinian lands, using phrases such as "ethnic cleansing" and "apartheid," and accuses Israel of "cloaking secular nationalism with sacred messianism."

It laments that the major streams of Judaism—Orthodox, Conservative, Reform, and Reconstructionist—have included the "Prayer for the State of Israel" in their prayer books, reflecting that "most Jewish theologians have turned a blind eye to the darker implications of the wedding of religion and state power in Israel."

At the same time, its critics note, the booklet makes scant reference to anti-Semitism, aggression, and terrorism suffered by Israelis or territories Israel has returned, such as the Sinai Peninsula and the Gaza Strip.

Walt Davis, education cochair of the IPMN, called the reaction to the study guide "knee-jerk" and "emotional" and said the guide is meant to open a discussion on Zionism and the harm it has done to the Palestinian people.

He said he can understand the strong "blowback" to the study guide, in that he grew up in the South and witnessed angry responses to the civil rights movement.

The publication of Zionism Unsettled comes as Secretary of State John Kerry is trying to broker a new peace agreement between Israelis and Palestinians, who have been negotiating since July.

Its publication also comes as the 2.4 million members of the PCUSA anticipate a June meeting of the General Assembly, which is expected to take up a resolution to divest church funds from companies that, in the view of the resolution's proponents, further the Israeli occupation.

The "Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions" movement against Israel has an active

base of support within the denomination, and a divestment resolution failed by a slim margin at the last meeting of the General Assembly. It also strained Jewish-Presbyterian relations.

The study guide will further estrange the denomination from the Jewish community, said Noam Marans, the American Jewish Committee's director of intergroup and interreligious relations. He said he does not buy the church's statement that the IPMN "speaks to the church and not for the church."

"This is a distinction without a difference when you are chartering IPMN and selling their propaganda on your home website," he said.

In response to a query from Religion News Service, denominational officials said that the IPMN does not speak for the denomination. The booklet was neither paid for nor published by the PCUSA, according to the church's statement on February 13.

"Our church has a long history of engaging many points of view when it comes to dialogue on critical issues facing the world around us—it's who we are, part of our DNA," said Linda Valentine, executive director of the Presbyterian Mission Agency. "There are likely as many differing opinions as there are Presbyterians—and, like many denominations, we don't always agree." Valentine noted also that Jewish voices are not unanimous on how a just peace can be achieved.

"We are in opposition to the settlements and occupation," said Sydney Levy, director of advocacy for Jewish Voice of Peace. "And we are not alone in this—Jews, Christians, and Muslims join us in the prayer for peace."

Some Presbyterians criticized the booklet, most notably Christopher Leighton, the executive director of the Institute for Christian and Jewish Studies, which is not affiliated with the church. In an open letter to study guide authors, Leighton wrote that "to suggest that the Jewish yearning for their own homeland—a yearning that we Presbyterians have supported for numerous other nations—is somehow theologically and morally abhorrent is to deny Jews their own identity as a people."—Lauren Markoe, RNS

A seashell shines at Episcopal cathedral

Forget crosses, saints, and scenes from the Bible. The prominent face of a cathedral should be adorned these days with something more welcoming to all people: a seashell.

That logic has given rise to a bold new look for the front of the Episcopal Cathedral Church of St. Paul, which overlooks Boston Common. Since May, a giant aluminum sculpture depicting the cross section of a chambered nautilus with a brilliant blue background has been lighting up the pediment and turning heads at one of Boston's busiest corners.

It's also igniting debate about what's lost and gained when a church uses its high-profile facade to display an ambiguous symbol rather than recognizable religious imagery.

The shell was chosen largely to draw attention to a granite structure that's dwarfed by neighboring buildings and easily overlooked, according to cathedral dean Jep Streit.

"We feel like we do extraordinary things here, and we wanted to proclaim that," Streit said. "One of our goals was to have something inviting that would attract attention and help us stand out."

Stand out it does. Nine months after its dedication, bloggers are still writing about it. This winter, parish study groups around the Episcopal Diocese of Massachusetts are discussing how the nautilus, an organism that's constantly expanding and switching homes, symbolizes the cathedral.

And the reviews are in. Tim Schenck, rector of an Episcopal church in Hingham, Massachusetts, lamented in a January blog post that the cathedral comes across as "theologically squishy."

The nautilus "would be great on a seafood restaurant or a contemporary art museum," Schenck said. In the cathedral, "I want to see a place that is preaching Christ with reckless abandon. And I feel that by putting the nautilus up there, they are backing off on that."

Streit insists a cross wouldn't have been inviting to non-Christians. "My question," Streit said, "to people who wonder whether we're selling out is: Does a cross say, 'come and see'? Or does it say, 'we're Christians here'?"

For St. Paul's, art on the facade has been a long time coming. Since its founding in 1820, the pediment had been empty because funds ran out for a rendering of the apostle. An \$8 million renovation project marked the perfect moment for the cathedral to make a bold, public statement through art.

But the seashell marks a radical departure from mainstream traditions of church art and architecture. Church art has long strived to be in service to evangelism, awakening people to God's grace and saving work in the world, according to J. Robert Wright, professor emeritus of church history at New York City's General Theological Seminary.

For a cathedral to display exterior art that's not recognizably Christian "is very unusual," Wright said.

But perhaps not surprising in 21st-century Boston.

Massachusetts ranks fourth among America's least religious states, according to a Gallup survey released in February. Boston is a young city with a large population of millennial-generation students and professionals, who are more likely than their parents to profess no religious affiliation.

Around the country, churches have been taking steps to broaden their appeal

by distancing themselves from denominational affiliations, said Ronald Simkins, director of the Kripke Center for the Study of Religion and Society at Creighton University. He pointed to Presbyterian and Baptist churches, for instance, which have dropped *Presbyterian* and *Baptist* from their names.

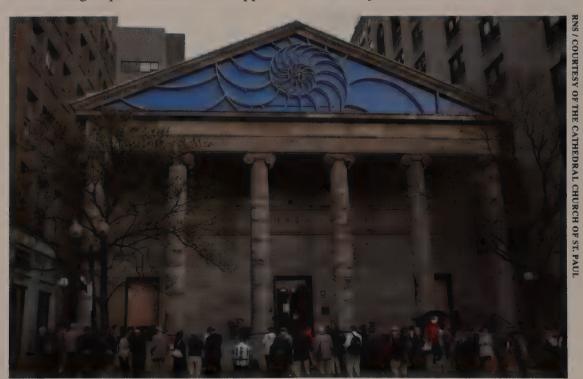
Now the cathedral in Boston is going one step further, he said, in aligning itself with a symbol that isn't loaded with sectarian or even Christian meaning.

"A nautilus is not filled with any overt religious themes," Simkins observed. "That's not to say you can't impute some religious themes, as it seems they have done. But you have to be informed about those. You have to go in and find out."

Artist Donald Lipski, who designed the nautilus, said this "church for all people" needed a symbol that could "be spiritual but not be religious." He cites Oliver Wendell Holmes's poem "The Chambered Nautilus," in which the poet likens the animal to a soul, continually expanding and relocating.

But some wonder how much communication is ultimately possible through an image that lacks familiar religious content.

"If it isn't anything that connects with the tradition of Christianity in a very explicit way," Wright said, "it's very difficult for it to get across its message." —G. Jeffrey MacDonald, RNS



SEA CHANGE: A crowd gathers in front of the Episcopal Cathedral Church of St. Paul, which overlooks Boston Common, during the dedication of a new aluminum sculpture depicting cross-sectioned chambered nautilus.

Baptisms prove to be not so spontaneous

A Southern Baptist megachurch pastor in North Carolina, already under fire for buying a \$1.6 million house, is in the spotlight for "spontaneous baptisms" that turned out to be not nearly so spontaneous.

Steven Furtick, 34, routinely draws about 14,000 worshipers to several campuses of Elevation Church in and around Charlotte. The church, launched in 2006, has been listed by *Outreach* magazine as one of the 100 fastest-growing churches in the country.

Part of that growth has been attributed to Elevation's flashy baptism ceremonies, particularly as the Southern Baptist Convention grows increasingly concerned about declining baptism rates as a key measure of evangelism and church vitality.

But a report from NBC Charlotte suggests that Elevation's supposedly spontaneous baptisms are carefully planned ahead of time, with people planted in the congregation to start the walk down the aisle.

"Fifteen people will sit in the worship experience and be the first ones to move when Pastor gives the call. Move intentionally through the highest visibility areas and the longest walk," a guide posted on a webpage for Furtick's book says.

The elaborate staging, the guide explains, is "how we activated our faith to pull off our part in God's miracle." The "spontaneous baptisms" are to be done quickly, "on average between 30 to 45 seconds," to keep things flowing, the guide suggests.

"Think of the [changing] room in terms of a NASCAR pit stop," the howto guide explains. "It has to be quick in and quick out."

The church provides everything a new convert needs to get ready for baptism, from dark-colored T-shirts and shorts in various sizes to sports bras, hair ties, deodorant, flip-flops, and makeup remover. Cheering volunteers man the doors to usher the "traffic" of new believers toward the front, and another set preps the converts for a dip in the baptismal pool.

"The first people going into the changing rooms have got to be people who move quickly, they must be changed and out on stage in a few minutes," it says. "Pick young energetic people, not necessarily those who are there first."

Elevation's baptism numbers have fluctuated, according to an internal report obtained by NBC, from 289 in 2010 to 2,410 in 2011, to 689 in 2012, to 3,519 in the first eight months of 2013. Overall, the SBC experienced a decline of 5.5 percent of baptisms between 2011 and 2012, according to the latest reported numbers.

Baptisms in the SBC—the nation's largest Protestant denomination—have declined during six of the last eight years, with 2012 experiencing the lowest rates since 1948.

A spokesman for the Southern Baptists' North American Mission Board, the agency that assists with planting churches like Elevation and that tracks baptism rates, declined to comment on Elevation's method of mass baptism, citing each church's autonomy.

Elevation received training, consultation, and financial support in its first two years, according to Brian Davis, associate executive director-treasurer of the Baptist State Convention of North Carolina. However, the church grew so quickly that the leadership no longer needed start-up help, he said.

Calls and e-mail sent to staff at Elevation Church were not returned.

Furtick's salary is set by a board of overseers made up of other megachurch pastors, some of whom have been invited to speak at Elevation, according to Warren Cole Smith, who lives in Charlotte and has written about Furtick for *World* magazine.

"People were willing to excuse his flamboyance and extravagant lifestyle by saying 'but he's doing such great work," Smith said. "Now, this new controversy calls into serious question the legitimacy of conversion rates the church has been claiming."

Furtick has associated himself with other megachurch pastors like Joel Osteen, James MacDonald, Ed Young Jr., Perry Noble, and T. D. Jakes, some of whom are criticized for promoting a prosperity gospel.

"This is one of the by-products of an evangelical movement that favors emotionalism and personal experience over doctrine, theology, and biblical teaching," Smith said.

Mass baptisms are not unheard of in Christian churches, but some pastors are wary of the practice, worried that some participants might not understand what baptism means, said Tony Merida, pastor of Imago Dei Church in Raleigh, North Carolina.

"I wasn't as surprised by [the baptisms] because we have a history in a lot of revivalism and evangelicalism in that type of planning to get numbers," said Merida, who is also a preaching professor at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary. "I can't imagine [the apostle] Peter saying, 'Hey, 15 of you get up and we'll see if 1,000 will join."

Merida points to the New Testament book of 2 Corinthians to explain why he'd be uncomfortable with a baptism that might appear to be manufactured. The apostle Paul writes: "Rather, we have renounced secret and shameful ways; we do not use deception."

What bothers Merida more, however, are images from coloring books that children are apparently using in Elevation classrooms that include a picture of Furtick. "We are united under the visionary," one page says. "Elevation Church is built on the vision God gave Pastor Steven. We will protect our unity in supporting his vision."

"You could start a cult this way," Merida said. "You could do so many crazy things with this ideology."

—Sarah Pulliam Bailey, RNS

Vatican lets public see excavated Roman cemetery

In the first century BC, a grassy hillside just north of what is now St. Peter's Square was used as a burial place for local Romans.

It remained in use, through dozens of mudslides and avalanches, until the early fourth century AD, when work on St. Peter's Basilica began and the more than 1,000 graves were covered over. Soon after, it was forgotten as the construction of the Vatican City grew up around it.

It remained that way until the 1950s, when plans to build a parking lot on what appeared to be an undeveloped



ON PUBLIC VIEW: An ancient cemetery, located underneath Vatican City and containing the graves of some of the earliest Roman Christians, is now open to the public.

field uncovered a small part of the 10,000-square-foot necropolis, or cemetery. That's when excavations began.

Now, two generations and hundreds of thousands of dollars later, the Vatican is letting the public see what it uncovered.

The Roman Necropolis of the Via Triumphalis illustrates changing burial traditions and the city's evolution from a pagan capital into its earliest days as a Christian city. Overseers say it is likely only a small number of those buried—no more than 50 of the 1,000 graves—may have belonged to early Christians.

"The area was constantly reborn between its establishment in the first century BC to around AD 300 or 320," said Giandomenico Spinola, an archaeologist specializing in Greek and Roman periods and the curator of the Vatican necropolis.

Mudslides and avalanches helped preserve much of what has been uncovered. Many items in the cemetery are unusually well preserved: some marble statues still bear signs of paint, and a child's remains show he still clenches a coin placed between his teeth according to the burial traditions of the time.

There was a period when the dead were cremated, with ashes and bone fragments placed in urns buried at the site, and other periods when the deceased were buried in elaborate plots complete with personal belongings and other symbols of social stature.

The site is unusual because it was used by poor and middle-class Romans.

Most well-preserved cemeteries in Rome are the burial sites of the noble and wealthy classes of the day.

"It's a fascinating way to view and learn something about this very important period," said Spinola. "We're just beginning to digest the value of what we've unearthed here."

The parking lot that led to the discovery of the cemetery in the 1950s has since been completed. The unlikely position of the site, under the parking lot and surrounded by administrative buildings, makes the view of the excavations even more surprising.

Excavations are ongoing, as they have been since 1956—the main difference is that starting in early February the public was allowed to visit the site. Reservations are required via the Vatican Museums website.—Eric J. Lyman, RNS

Briefly Noted

Seminaries have a reputation for being late adapters when it comes to technology. Southern Evangelical Seminary and Bible College in Matthews, North Carolina, wants to change that. On February 14 it introduced a humanoid NAO (pronounced "now") robot. The school of Christian apologetics claims it's the first in the world to use a robot to study the ethics of emerging technologies. The white robot with an orange cap from the French com-

pany Aldebaran Robotics stands 23 inches high and includes voice and facial recognition and full mobility. It translates text to speech in seven languages. The robot retails for \$16,000, but Southern got an end-of-the-year deal at \$9,300. Schools such as MIT, the University of Tokyo, and Carnegie Mellon are experimenting with NAO robots as personal assistants. They can be used to feed pets and help children with autism.

- An 84-year-old nun was sentenced to nearly three years in prison on February 18 for breaking into a Tennessee nuclear facility in July 2012. Sister Megan Rice and two other antinuclear activists were convicted last May of breaking into a federal complex that stores enriched uranium. "Please have no leniency on me. To remain in prison for the rest of my life would be the greatest honor you could give me," Rice told the federal judge at her sentencing hearing, according to USA Today. U.S. District judge Amul Thapar in Knoxville said he wanted the sentence to send a signal that others need to work for change within the bounds of the law. The three activists have been in custody since May, when a federal jury convicted them of damaging the Y-12 National Security Complex in Oak Ridge, and could have received up to 20 years for the crime.
- Roman Catholics in Ottawa are no longer permitted to deliver eulogies during funeral masses, the local archbishop has decreed. The February 2 decree from Archbishop Terrence Prendergast reminds the faithful that Catholics gather at funerals "not to praise the deceased, but to pray for them." Contrary to popular belief, eulogies "are not part of the Catholic funeral rites, particularly in the context of a funeral liturgy within mass," the decree stated. Many Catholics, it pointed out, do not know this. Priests are "strongly" urged to encourage Catholics to speak publicly about loved ones outside the mass-at funeral homes, receptions, or in a parish hall. Eulogies are "words of praise without reference to God," he stated, while a mass "is an act of faith." But because of the popularity of at least "words of remembrance," a compromise was reached to allow a short three- to four-minute eulogy at the beginning of the liturgy.

The Word

Sandoy, March 23 July 25-27

WHAT IF WE gave up division for Lent? I wish we could let go of those things that divide us. Last year was a signal moment as many commemorated the civil rights movement and Martin Luther King Jr.'s "I Have a Dream" speech. I spoke on several occasions about the still necessary hope for racial unity where there is instead a devastating divide and about how so many wish desperately that we could let that division go. I suggested that a package deal would be nice. We could take other divisions that trouble our social and political attempts at unity: regional, gender, sexual orientation, economic, religious, and ideological. Then we'd harvest them into one magnificent, writhing bundle and just let them all go. What a season of Lent it would be!

But we don't do this. Perhaps we lack the will. Perhaps we lack direction. We need guideposts and leaders to show us the way. The author of the fourth Gospel understands. In his account of Jesus' ministry he takes care to include an incident that models the bravest of efforts at letting go of a human division that has created deep social barriers.

Jesus is on a journey from Judea to Galilee. Because he has to walk through the ethnic minefield that is Samaria, he might as well be on a trip from the past (the world as it is) into the future (the world as God intends). Jesus has to make this trip. The necessity is not geographical, as Warren Carter points out; it's theological. "[The necessity] reveals God's inclusive love for all." It reveals God's attempt to lead us away from our drive to divide.

The first-century ethnic hatred between the Samaritans and the Jews is widely acknowledged. Ethnic ancestry links the Samaritans and the Jews in the "promised land" settled by the Hebrew tribes. But after the Assyrian conquest in 721 BC, the tribes that had settled in the northern portion of Canaan were deported and dispersed. By the first century AD these Samaritan tribes worshiped God on Mount Gerizim instead of Jerusalem, the preferred Jewish site. The division became deeper than a difference in the place of worship; it was a difference based in blood and identity. The peoples were religious about this ethnic divide and faithful to the hate that generated from it.

Jesus walked head-on into this hate when he intentionally wandered into the Samaritan city of Sychar and took a seat by a Samaritan well. This thirsty man who was the source of living water provided the model and the modus operandi for letting go of division. He sat waiting by a well without the necessary

container for drawing water because he was waiting for something other than water. He was waiting for a Samaritan.

And a Samaritan showed up. Unsurprisingly, since drawing the water was primarily a woman's job, the Samaritan was a woman. Jesus had inserted himself into a situation where, in order to fulfill God's intent, he had to let go of the rule that said that a man of stature did not converse publicly with a woman and that a Jew did not interact with a Samaritan. He had the will to let go of that rule; he also had the way to do so. He chose a circumstance of division, then instigated community.

The Samaritan woman knew the power of ethnic division and wondered why Jesus wasn't adhering to the principle that had maintained this distance for so long. "Why does a Jew ask a Samaritan for a drink of water?"

Jesus could have said that he had no container with which to draw water. He could have said that he was thirsty. Instead, he said, "If you knew the gift of God that is me, you would have asked me for a drink, and I would have given you living water."

Jesus wanted to make a point. He asked his question to provoke the response that he knew would come. A Jew does not ask a Samaritan for water. A Samaritan, in any case, would not feel obliged to provide it. According to Jesus' odd response, Jesus is God's response to this circumstance of division. In him God provides a reservoir of living water that is as available to Samaritans as it is to Jews. Throughout the gospel, the offer of Jesus' person, power, and life was available to every Jewish person he met; now Jesus was saying that Samaritans too could ask for and receive this gift and that God did not respect the divide that the Samaritans and the Jews so religiously maintained. Here Jesus announces that worship of God is not tied to geographical divisions but crosses boundaries. True worshipers of God commemorate God not in contested spaces segregated for some and against others, but in the location of spirit and truth.

Jesus has shown the way that cuts across the boundaries that humans devise—a way whereby life in real community can exist. In John 4 he precipitated community by acting against division, and for a brief moment he succeeded. While Jesus remained at the well the woman ran into the Samaritan city and proclaimed Jesus to her people. The Samaritans came to see Jesus and his Jewish disciples, and they believed and stayed with them. For two days Jews and Samaritans prayed and worshiped together as an undivided people. Where there had been division there was now community. If John had recorded Jesus' activity in the way the synoptic authors recorded Jesus' parables, he might well have ended with "Go and do likewise."

Reflections on the lectionary

Soudon, March 30 I Soudel Bel 13

CAN SOMEONE be called and not know it, at least until God does something to reveal God's intentions? Apparently David is an example of this—and yes, one can lose connection with God's call and not know it. When God's intentions were revealed to Saul, for example, he was in total shock. As Samuel knew, it's a very difficult challenge to help someone recognize a call that's been lost or to grow into a call that's been issued. But having received his own call, Samuel understood how God works. He surprised Saul by revealing that God intended Saul to be king (1 Sam. 9–10); later he was sent to rescind the kingship that had been given to Saul and deliver it to David. Samuel's work was difficult, demanding, sometimes heart-wrenching, and necessary.

We are not Samuel. I doubt that any of us would want to carry the agonizing weight of responsibility that burdened him as he made the trek between Saul and David. And yet as part of God's community of faith, as members of the body of

Christ, we too have a role to play in helping those around us recognize how God is moving people in ways that they may not see. And when they do recognize God's presence and even God's call, we have a role to play in nurturing these persons as they process what God is saying and how they should respond.

Theological education plays an important part in this critical process of identifying, developing, and nurturing leaders in God's community. In seminaries, divinity schools, and schools of theology, we teachers and leaders do our best work when we not only teach content but also assist students in their quest to identify more clearly God's call and learn in ways that will enable their most capable response to that call.

In the most difficult moments we help a select few realize that God has gifted them in areas other than Christian communal leadership. Sometimes a sense of call can and needs to be redirected. Some recognize, even after time spent in seminary, that God has called them to use their gifts in another way. And then there are the most joyous moments: when we stand with our graduates as a church confirms God's call to them through ordination. Like theological educators across our country and throughout the world, I am tremendously blessed to be called to the work of nurturing and equipping those whom God is directing toward leadership.

And yet this work is not the work of professional theological educators alone. It is the work of congregants who notice a potential for faith leadership in a member of their congregation. It is the work of secondary and undergraduate teachers who recognize an intellectual inquisitiveness and a sensibility in certain students and suggest to these students that God is on the move in their lives. It is the work of all of us in Christian community who use our resources to give guidance and assistance to those who have questions about what God is doing in their lives and who point them to faith leaders who can give them counsel. We all have a role to play.

While not one of us can be Samuel, all of us can follow Samuel's lead. We can watch and listen for how God is moving in the lives of those who populate our faith communities, and we can help them figure out if that movement is the result of a particular call. Who knows, perhaps some of us have been called by God to help someone else realize his or her call.

In Charlotte and Durham, North Carolina, and in Richmond, Virginia, communities of faith are pooling their resources and their counsel to do this work. These congregations network with church members, business leaders, college

Some of us have been called to help others hear their call.

chaplains, and local pastors to provide communal space for those who are sensing God's call into ministry. They help these people to reflect on that sensibility and allow it the opportunity to breathe. They encourage those who are sensing God's call to consider theological education. And they provide scholarships for a year of theological study so that these students can have the space, the time, and the teaching to ascertain the depth and fullness of that call. These communities are not Samuel—but they are Samuel-like.

Be like Samuel. This is a calling. In a time when the church, like Samuel's Israel, needs strong leaders, we all have a role to play in God's choreographed design for the future of God's church. As we reflect upon all that God has done and is doing in our lives during this season of Lent, we acknowledge that God issues a specific and special call to some individuals. We can, even in a small way, help clarify and amplify that call.

The author is Brian K. Blount, president and professor of New Testament at Union Presbyterian Seminary in Richmond, Virginia.

Ministerial group bridges left-right divide

No longer strangers

by Debra Bendis

IN 2009 THE Richland County Ministerial Association was on the skids. Only six or eight pastors were showing up at the monthly meeting, a number that represented less than a third of the churches in this southwestern Wisconsin county. All but two of them were mainline pastors. Fifteen years earlier the evangelical pastors had split off and formed their own association. The culture wars were hot at the time, with Christians clashing over abortion laws, homosexuality, the inerrancy of scripture, gender roles, creationism, and politics.

One of the two conservative evangelicals who still attended the RCMA was Mike Breininger, pastor of the largest nondenominational church in the county. Liberals called Richland Center Fellowship "the flag-waving church." RCF had a group that used flags in choreographed presentations and parades. For many years the church also performed a Passion play called *The Keys*, which drew some 40,000 people over the years. Breininger had been a wrestler at the University of Wisconsin, and he was known as a tough, no-nonsense leader. No one knew why he was still attending what most of his peers regarded as the liberal RCMA.

It wasn't because he loved liberals or the RCMA. "My faithful attendance had nothing to do with a desire to see the association prosper," said Breininger. "I was deeply concerned that the differences between the theological liberals and conservatives, and the ranting of those wanting everyone else to adopt their agenda, were a disgrace to the name of Christ. I didn't want to lead the association. I wanted to silence it."

Another frustrated pastor in the RCMA was Larry Engel—a liberal. He attended only sporadically, complaining that the meetings often had "no agenda, no purpose, and no direction."

Engel was pastor of Five Points Lutheran Church, part of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. He has been "on the left my whole life." For Engel, raised in a Pittsburgh neighborhood where the steelworkers' union was strong, ministry is linked to democratic organizing, liberation theology, and anything that empowers people. He has worked with the union movement, on organizing undocumented Mexican workers, and against the KKK.

But "I was an increasingly lonely liberal," said Engel. He felt stuck in stereotypes and was feeling increasingly marginalized in public life. He was concerned that regardless of brand name, churches had lost public influence. "We had lost market share big time and were in a spiritual recession every bit as devastating as the latest economic recession and Hurricane Katrina." In his own act of resistance to the status quo, Engel decided to attend the 2009 National Day of Prayer gathering, which was sponsored by the Evangelical Association. The pastor who gave the opening prayer said, "Dear Lord, we pray for the conversion of all those non-born again pastors in this county."

"He was talking about me," Engel recalled. "I looked around the crowd and realized I was the only mainline Protestant in the crowd. I was not only lonely, but targeted."

"I was being stretched, and my core beliefs were getting a workout."

On the other side of the divide, Breininger was charting his own way through the culture wars. "My image of the liberals was that they were arrogant and angry about nearly everything. They thought their agenda should be accepted by all and were willing to literally yell it at the ministerial association meetings, print it in the newspaper, or tell anyone who would listen. They were not my friends. They were people I had to stop from damaging the name of Christ in our community."

hen everything changed—Breininger was elected president of the RCMA. He was stunned. "Why would they want me, the contrarian, to play the role of president? I found myself at a crossroads I never expected to face. How could I work for an organization that I loathed? I knew that the Spirit of God nudged me to be a builder and reconciler rather than a destroyer. But if there were to be any chance for something redemptive to come out of this adventure, I'd need a heart change and a new vision."

Breininger decided to accept leadership and began by insisting that topics at monthly meetings be discussed in a respectful and timely fashion. He created agendas for the monthly meetings and tried to raise expectations. He drafted a paper titled "Pastoral Courtesies" that outlined ten rules of civil conversation.

"The pastors were warm to the ideas but not excited," he

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ACROSS THE AISLE: Mike Breininger (left) and Larry Engel have sought to bridge political and religious divisions.

said. "The heart of the association was on a slow curve of change—far too slow for me."

Breininger, who calls himself the "consummate conservative evangelical," decided that the only way things could really change was by him building relationships with people on the other side of the political and theological spectrum and finding some common passions. "I saw them only as the people who worked against what I believed in. If this new effort was going to get off the ground, I had to find some people from the mainline liberal ranks who thought there was virtue in trying to work together."

Engel was impressed. He saw Breininger inviting evangelical pastors into the RCMA, broadening the base and changing the character of the discussion. He saw Breininger countering the mainliners' anxiety with the evangelicals' energy. The decision to adopt "Pastoral Courtesies" brought both sides into agreement for the first time in years.

"I realized," said Engel, "that Mike was serious about crossing the battlefield into new territory. He would get his hands dirty, work through the issues. I liked that a lot. He was a leader and a disciple, one who had integrity, humility, and a deep commitment to the gospel. I was beginning to feel less lonely and part of something purposeful, challenging, and Christlike."

At the end of a meeting, Engel went up to Breininger and thanked him for running a productive meeting. Breininger was startled. All he knew about Engel was that he was regarded as a likable liberal, was pastor of a rural church, and taught at a Catholic college.

"I was surprised by the compliment," said Breininger. "I don't recall a liberal pastor ever complimenting me about anything. Maybe the liberals were more than just red-faced name callers who thought they needed to inform the evangelicals of their foolish antiquated views of the Bible."

"Larry pressed me to get together with him and talk about future possibilities," remembered Breininger. "At first I hesitated. Would the other evangelicals think I had sold out? Yes, evangelicals and liberals were both attending the association meetings, and we were getting along. There were 15 to 20 of us and sometimes more. There was an expectation when we met that God was doing something among us. But some feared that the old wars would resume."

"As we began to spend time with each other," recalled Engel, "I realized that the labels conservative and right wing were still there, but that liberal and left wing—words that I loved—were scorned by Mike as vehemently as the words I used for him. We were suspicious of each other, and at first the trust level was weak and tentative. On some issues—on homosexuality, inerrancy of scriptures, creation—we were each true to form. But on others—homelessness, churches working together, the kingdom of God, orphans and widows—we agreed. We intentionally

worked on those issues while at the same time holding our ground on our differences. Trust and respect grew."

One day Engel invited Breininger to attend an Industrial Areas Foundation training session in Madison. He supported the IAF's process of holding relational meetings that identified common interests and brought out people's values, allegiances, and motives. He thought the training could help the two men craft a public relationship, one that would allow them to work together without leaving their traditions behind.

Breininger was skeptical. The IAF people were linked to the world of community organizing, a world that evangelicals generally did not appreciate. The IAF crowd included the kind of people who had shaped and helped elect Barack Obama; they were linked to the notorious community organizer Saul Alinsky. Breininger's instinct was to stay away. But he knew if he didn't try to cross some relational lines, there could never be progress toward cooperation.

But both Breininger and Engel were eager for change. They knew that the civic sector was in trouble and that mediating institutions—churches, families, schools, nonprofit organizations—were weakening and the social fabric unraveling. Their experience in Madison together might help build something. They decided to go.

"To my surprise," said Breininger, "I enjoyed the training. The IAF presenter Arnie Graf, a national leader, leaned liberal but talked a lot about reaching out beyond the left. I bombarded him with questions. Unlike many liberals, he did not get angry, red-faced, and start calling me names. He answered my questions and gave me a sense of possibility in the methods of the IAF."

During the ride home, Engel said to Breininger, "I learned some things from you today." The comment struck Breininger in an unexpected way. "He said he had learned

On Botticelli's Annunciation

I have met them in the Uffizi
the angel hunched on bended knee—
his thigh thick beneath his satin robe—
the virgin's urgent contrapposto
her sudden arm extended long
beyond the border of her cape
halting his rehearsed song
as if his theme weren't love but rape.

Her face impossibly serene does not betray her body's fear. His deathless eyes have never seen a mortal woman quite so near. The space between their outstretched hands salvation in a single glance.

Angela Alaimo O'Donnell

from me? It made me wonder: Was I learning from him? From that point on I set my heart on learning from my friend, the liberal pastor."

Engel also remembers that ride home from Madison. "Man, did Mike and I ever have differences! Take unions, for example. I've been a farmworker organizer, and Mike's opposition got my dander up. We argued about that and immigration reform. Or maybe we wrestled. Regardless, I was being stretched, and my core beliefs were getting a workout."

The two began to talk about the community and discussed

"Would the other evangelicals think I had sold out?"

gathering community leaders together, with the churches leading the way, to build relationships that might produce cooperation and address community problems. They invited pastors, business leaders, and people from the social sector, law enforcement, the judicial system, public schools, county and city government, and health and human services agencies. These leaders came to the first Community Leaders Forum and kept coming. They didn't seem to mind that the churches were taking the lead role. In fact, some seemed to think it was about time the churches got their act together and started working for the common good.

few local projects began to change the work of the RCMA. One was a decision to redesign the traditional ecumenical Good Friday service. What had been a very traditional event with a declining turnout was moved from a mainline church to an evangelical church. The service featured a band, scenes from *The Keys*, and choreographed worship dances. The Free Methodist pastor had everyone place a stone at the foot of the cross. The stones symbolized sins and failures—and an unwillingness to work together. Ten pastors and 450 people attended.

The feedback was enthusiastic. Engel and Breininger heard comments such as "Why haven't we done this before?" and "This cooperation is the work of the Holy Spirit" and "I've been praying for this."

In 2011 these efforts at ministerial cooperation were challenged when Governor Scott Walker and his fellow Republicans, as part of a budget deal, all but eliminated collective bargaining for most public workers in the state and eroded the power of the unions. Act 10 made it harder for public unions to be formed by requiring 51 percent support from all workers eligible to be in the union, and not just from those who were voting.

Like the rest of the state, Richland County was split down the middle by Act 10. Half of the yard signs and bumper stickers said "Recall Walker"; half said "Support Walker." Mainline pastors were on one side and the evangelicals were on the other. Could pastors find common ground in this conflict or at least be civil in expressing their differences? The state senator for Richland County was Dale Schultz, who had not yet declared which way he would vote. When a labor leader asked Engel if he would organize district pastors to meet with and lobby Senator Schultz, he agreed. Ten pastors signed on—including Breininger, the only evangelical.

On the drive to Madison the two men argued about the state budget and Act 10 and about how each would lobby on different sides of the issue. In the car, Engel's cell phone rang. One of RCMA's evangelical pastors was on the line. "Larry, turn the car around," the pastor begged. "Don't do this. You're destroying all of the hard work of our association in one act. This is political. This will break us apart."

Engel responded that he hoped that the trip would convey that there was room for different opinions. He passed the phone to Mike, who concurred. "I'm not compromising any of my beliefs by being part of this delegation," he said.

Thousands of people were protesting in Madison that day, and chants echoed throughout the capitol rotunda. In Schultz's office, Breininger was the only one of the ten clergy present who supported Walker's legislation.

Just before going into the meeting, the pastors' group was told that a press conference had been set up so that the group could speak out against Act 10. The conference was scheduled immediately following the meeting.

"I felt manipulated," said Engel, "as if I were being asked to play a character in a public drama. I also knew my side would lose no matter how Senator Schultz voted. I declined the invitation to participate in that interview."

Back at home, the evangelical pastor who had wanted to halt their trip said, "I'm OK with it now. I never expected you two to be in the same car on the way to the capitol, especially when you are on opposite sides."

Breininger sees that visit to the capitol as "the first big test of our newly formed camaraderie." When Engel declined the opportunity to speak, Breininger's respect for him jumped several notches.

"Larry was not expressing the liberal anger I'd seen for the last 30 years. We argued about the issues *because* this was a guy I could trust. We have seen good things happen together."

Two weeks later the RCMA sponsored the May National Day of Prayer for the first time. Sixteen pastors and a handful

of others convened at the Episcopal church. They were led by a retired Episcopal priest, a veteran of local religious clashes. Pastors took turns reading scripture and reciting prayers from the Book of Common Prayer. Mike led the Confession and Forgiveness of Sins—an evangelical in a mainline church forgiving the sins of everyone with a reading from the Book of Common Prayer.

When Breininger's two-year term as president of RCMA ended, he was torn. Although initially he hadn't wanted the job, he'd come to enjoy it and had seen progress. If this grand experiment was to keep going, there was only one thing to

do: Engel had to become the next president. "I could never have imagined myself nominating a liberal mainline pastor, but that's what happened," said Breininger. "It was Larry's turn to take leadership and my turn to support him."

As president, Engel actively engaged evangelicals. He pushed for a Youth Advisor Initiative and helped the association develop church-operated homeless shelters. When liberals in the organization fell into "liberal speak," he challenged them.

Today the RCMA has 22 member churches, holds five ecumenical worship events a year, and has become a creative incubator for cooperative church ministries. The Roman Catholic Church and Seventh-day Adventists joined the association after RCMA did some one-on-one relational work with their leaders. The Evangelical Ministerial Association has ceased to exist.

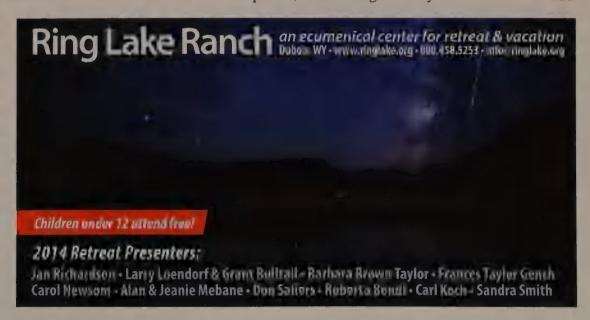
Richland Center Fellowship has four new rural homeless shelters: a 15-day emergency shelter rotating monthly between churches, a shelter for single men, a 90-day shelter for families with children, and two-year transitional shelters for families with children. Each effort is volunteer-led and church-funded. The association followed the lead of an interdenominational team of Christian women and developed a cooperative vacation Bible school and a youth ministries program.

The Family Restoration Project puts families with troubled youths together with mentoring church families and a youth adviser. The hope is that new relationships will emerge. The program is fully supported by the school district and recognized and funded by business leaders.

Breininger and Engel don't pretend to have discarded their differences. The scars and wounds from the culture wars are still fresh, and rural communities are long on memory and quick to point fingers. But something has changed in Richland County.

"People now see the churches as influential and able to accomplish meaningful efforts," says Breininger. "People look to the churches to make a difference in the community and in the lives of people. The Richland County experiment is working better than I had expected. I see God at work here, so there is no limit."

Says Engel: "While it's not clear just what the future holds or that the common ground will be held, we're seeing an ecumenical cooperative of churches growing. Plus, although I'm still a liberal pastor, I'm no longer lonely."



Novelist Kent Haruf

The precious ordinary

KENT HARUF'S NOVELS are set in the fictional town of Holt on the eastern plains of Colorado. His 1999 novel Plainsong was a finalist for the National Book Award. Haruf's father was a Methodist minister in Colorado, and Haruf has often drawn on that legacy in his fiction. Only in his latest novel, Benediction, has a minister been a central character in his fiction.

Can you tell us about growing up as the son of a Methodist minister in the West?

Until I was about 12 years old, we lived in three little towns in eastern Colorado. In each town, my father was the preacher at the only Methodist church in town.

My dad was a country man. He fit in wonderfully in those little towns; people loved him. When he was in college, they called him Lovable Louie, because he was such a joyful man.

I cannot say that he was a great pulpit speaker. He was adequate. But once he got out of the pulpit, he shone. When he walked into a room, people just wanted to be near him. He had a great sense of humor. He was a wonderful storyteller.

My mom was more ambitious for him than he was for himself. My mom grew up in South Dakota on a sheep ranch, and they met at Dakota Wesleyan University. My mom was very precisely spoken. I remember hearing them as they lay in bed on Sunday morning. He would read his sermon to her, and she would correct any grammar that needed to be corrected. My mom was his best friend, his confidante, and his adviser. He called her "Pal."

What was church like for you?

We would endure church. I hated Sunday school, because nothing ever happened. When I was in high school, we spent time every Sunday trying to memorize the Apostles' Creed. There was an old guy trying to teach it to us, and it was a waste of time. I still don't know it.

The only thing I remember with any pleasure was learning to sing the song "Do Lord." I loved that. In the summer we had to go to Bible school, which I also hated. Best thing about that was the cookies.

My younger brother Mark and I always had to sit with my mother in church. There was a big clock on the wall that we would stare at to see how much longer church was going to last. My little brother and I got into the habit of seeing how long we could hold our breath. We would watch the minute hand go around and test ourselves. The other thing we would



do is tell my mom that we had to go to the bathroom. But you would have to ask her in the last 15 minutes; otherwise you would have to come back.

It was so funny to watch people sleep in church. Their heads would rock back, mouth open, and then all of the sudden they would wake up. One astonishing time, I watched a woman nurse a baby in church. Then Mark and I could quit watching the clock and watch this woman instead.

Any other church memories?

Back in those days there would be gospel singers coming through, black guys from the south, and they would stay with us overnight. That was partly because hotels in those little towns were terrible and partly because those men might not have been accept-

What I saw as a kid was hypocrisy, and it galled me.

ed. I don't know. But my dad had played football with a black guy at Dakota Wesleyan, and he had very strong feelings about race. He didn't talk much about it, but he acted on it. I grew up thinking that's what people did: they read books and they told stories and they extended hospitality to people from different backgrounds.

What is the legacy of Methodist Christianity for you?

What I saw as a kid was hypocrisy, and it really galled me. I would see people profess certain things on Sunday morning, and I would see different things during the week: meanness and alcoholism and violence and unkindness.

As I got older, I felt that the Methodist hierarchy had mistreated my father because he was a country person. He wasn't an intellectual, he was not a sophisticated speaker, but he was, in my view, a true Christian. They misjudged him for their own reasons. By the time I was 18, I had left the church intellectually and emotionally.

Did that hurt your parents?

They never understood it, and we never talked about it. When I went home, I would go to church with my family. I never had a conversation about religion with my father in my life. He demonstrated his faith by his actions.

Though religion was central in your upbringing, it doesn't come up that often in your fiction.

One time I was giving a talk at a university, and a guy told

me that *Plainsong* has no religious themes because there are no scenes set in a church. I suggested to him that *Plainsong* is full of spiritual moments, if maybe not orthodox religious moments.

Whenever someone takes in someone who needs help or befriends someone who is lonely—those are religious acts. They fit the basic tenet of all religions. Jesus said, "What you've done to the least of these, you have done to me. I was hungry and you fed me; I was naked and you clothed me." That is exactly what some people in the novel are doing. It is not under the auspices of a church, but it is the essence of compassion and spiritual feeling.

Raymond McPheron in *Plainsong* is a kind of small-town—I wouldn't say saint, but he is a religious figure. He would never say that about himself, and people would never really understand that. But they might be attracted to his character.

In your fiction, you very rarely tell us what your characters are thinking. Why is that?

That is a deliberate choice on my part, and it is has become more conscious the longer I have written. To me, it is a cheat to go into someone's mind. It is a way of avoiding the difficulty of having to create scenes.

What is more powerful, more vivid, more indelible is to create a scene where people are doing the things they are thinking. I have become more adamant about showing what people are thinking, not telling you what they think. I don't want to get between you and that setting and those characters. It is almost like a screenplay. It is external rather than internal.

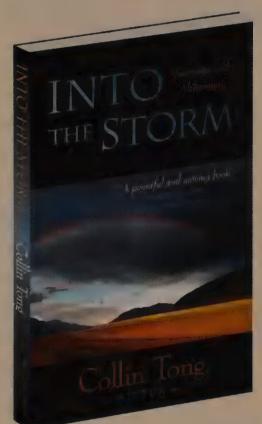
Why did you put a minister into Benediction?

I didn't start there. I imagined Dad Lewis, Mary, Frank, and Lorraine. Then their neighbors. Then I began to wonder who else would come to see Dad Lewis in his dying days. In a small town, the preacher would come. My dad went to see dying people all the time. That was a familiar fact for me.

I wanted to create a different kind of preacher—someone who had his own problems and who would be in opposition to what would be normal in a small town like that. Reverend

INTO THE STORM

Journeys with Alzheimer's



Last year, an estimated 5.2 million Americans had Alzheimer's disease. In this compelling new anthology, twenty-three writers, journalists, educators, social workers, health practitioners, and clergy from across the United States share their experiences caring for family members with Alzheimer's disease and dementia.

COLLIN TONG is a correspondent for Crosscut News and Seattle-based stringer for The New York Times.



A resource that will offer solace and strength to those who find themselves in the crucible of one of life's most difficult challenges—caring for a loved one who slips away in the long night of dementia.

— The Very Rev. Dr. Steven L. Thomason, Dean and Rector Saint Mark's Episcopal Cathedral, Seattle, Washington

As this collection so richly documents, when a parent or life-partner is afflicted with Alzheimer's...the common thread that builds our humanity comes from actively engaging the support of others.

— **Troy Duster**, Chancellor's Professor Earl Warren Institute of Law and Social Policy University of California, Berkeley

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"By committing themselves to meet regularly together, Christians become aware of those who are not gathering together—those who are absent. This is how the community develops the practice of pastoral care and evangelism, the skill of memory for those missing, the virtue of love for the lost, and the notion of the communion of saints."

(from Improvisation: The Drama of Christian Ethics)



Lyle had had trouble in Denver because he had supported a gay preacher. I started out with Reverend Lyle being a Methodist because that's what I knew, but I decided that was going to confine me too much, so I messed around with that some.

Not too much, though, because he does have a son named John Wesley.

True. I thought about naming his son Calvin but decided against it. I have him give a sermon based on the Sermon on the Mount because to me that is the most important message that Jesus ever gave, maybe that anybody ever gives: to love your enemy. How can you do that? It is all the more difficult after 9/11.

There are only one or two ways of dating this book, and one is that Reverend Lyle mentions bodies falling from the towers. So we know this sermon is given some time after 2001.

This country was, as we all know, horrified, rightly so, by what happened at the World Trade Center. But I think we completely missed a chance as a country to respond. We reacted in the traditional way of violence against violence. And we didn't fix a damn thing. We made more enemies for this country.

There is another moment in *Benediction* when Reverend Lyle names something that seems crucial in your work: "the precious ordinary."

I don't think I knew it at the time, but that does sum up what I hope to achieve: to do what Chekhov did, to show the beauty and the significance of ordinary people and ordinary moments. To make significance out of trivialities, not to be blind to them, not to miss them. He is trying to see that.

When I think about Reverend Lyle's character, what I see is that he is trying to see what real life looks like because he doesn't understand it. He is a pretty good pulpit speaker. He is dramatic and a man of principle. At home he is pretty much a failure as a husband and a father. Until his son tries to commit suicide, then I think that humanizes him. He is able to take his son down from that terrible place and to hug him, and even to call him "honey." That was a huge difference from what he had been doing.

I think it is possible for Reverend Lyle to say things like "the precious ordinary," whereas other characters like Dad Lewis, for example, or Raymond—they can't say that kind of thing. But someone who has some skill with language would be able to say that.

Sorrow and joy seem intermingled in your fiction.

Sorrow and sadness are part of these stories and of my life. You wake up with it, but it's not all that is there. The way I think about it, these characters have to stack joy on top of sorrow. You have to work harder at recognizing joy than you do sorrow. I am much more accustomed to adversity. I can deal with adversity. I've been doing it for 70 years.

I don't know what to do with joy. I don't know how to take it in. Sorrow is the constant: that is the condition of being human. Maybe it isn't original sin, but we are born into sorrow.

But people are capable of such flashes of beauty. I talked to a book club awhile back about *Benediction*. One of the women in the group got really exercised about Reverend Lyle's wife. She was up in arms: "That woman should never have left her son with her husband." A woman sitting near her said, "I did that." It got really quiet in the room. She said, "When my husband and I separated, I left my son with him, and I took the two girls with me."

She didn't say anything more, but it was clear that 50 years later, it was still on her mind. I wanted to kiss her. What bravery. What courage to say that. The people in that group didn't know each other that well. And the statement didn't seem to make an impact on the other woman. But it changed the rest of us. That was one of those rare, beautiful human moments. And it had something to do with religion.

-Amy Frykholm

MORETHAN NOONE

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The past is now

by John G. Turner

AMERICANS ARE ambivalent about the past. They watch the History Channel and episodes of a costume drama like *Downton Abbey*, and they flock to Civil War battlefields and compile their genealogies on ancestry.com. But they also tend to fall asleep in history class. Americans are enchanted with the past but suspicious of formal attempts to study it.

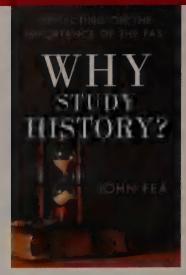
Christians should love history. Ours is a historical faith, oriented around the life of a man who lived 2,000 years ago. Our scriptures tell of the ancient interactions between God and a chosen people. Even as they point us to a future final consummation of God's kingdom, they encourage us to tell our children about the wondrous things God has done in the past.

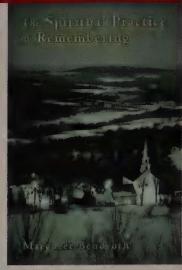
In America, Christians have often discarded much of that past. The "restorationist" Christians of the early 19th century rejected denominationalism. They thought that Christians could dispense with centuries of history and return to the purity of the early church. And Americans have often been suspicious of inherited wisdom. In 1838, Ralph Waldo Emerson told the graduates of Harvard Divinity School that "the need was never greater of new revelation than now." Human beings should throw off the shackles of the past and find the divine within, he said. The experiences and ideas of Christians over the past two millennia mattered little.

Not so fast, say Margaret Bendroth and John Fea. Bendroth, director of the Congregational Library in Boston, nudges congregations to adopt spiritual practices of remembrance. Fea, professor of history at Messiah College, encourages students to explore the academic discipline of history. Both contend that Christians need to encounter the past in all its complexity and humanity.

Bendroth notes that in our era, secular time has replaced sacred, liturgical time. Secular time is linear, progressive. "If time is always moving forward," she writes, "the past is always becoming more distant and more irrelevant."

But it was not always so. In medieval Europe, for instance, individuals saw the lives of biblical figures as not fundamentally different from their own. In fact, as is evident in medieval and Reformation art, they could readily see themselves as part of biblical scenes, placing royalty and reformers within the fabric of sacred time and drama. They did not assume that the present was better than the past, that they were more enlightened and humane than their ancestors. Modern people, by contrast, in the words of Peter Fritzsche, are "stranded in the present."





Why Study History? Reflecting on the Importance of the Past

By John Fea Baker, 192 pp., \$19.99 paperback

The Spiritual Practice of Remembering By Margaret Bendroth Eerdmans, 142 pp., \$16.00 paperback

When modern people stop and take more than a superficial glance at the past, they probably don't like what they find. After all, the past is a strange place filled with strange people. If we are honest explorers and interpreters of the past, it will not be easy to use it for our present-day purposes.

Fea reports on a visitor from the American Midwest to Plimouth Plantation who was shocked to learn that William Bradford, the governor of the colony, was "a believer in community to whom secular capitalist enterprise was blasphemous, selfish individualism anathema." Likewise, many members of the New England parishes familiar to Bendroth would be repulsed by the Calvinist theology contained in their forebears' musty books.

Peering further back into the recesses of history, we might also find ourselves disappointed by the ancient Israelites, a violent and polygamous people, or by some of the authors of the New Testament, who had derogatory things to say about certain groups.

Perhaps it is safer to just leave the past behind. But that is not Fea or Bendroth's recommendation. Fea even recommends the discipline of history to Christian undergraduates. He exaggerates somewhat the job prospects for history majors and how the study of history can help mend our fraying civil society. More compellingly, he argues that believing that humans are created in God's image should encourage us to see glimpses of the sacred in human history. And the belief that all people are created in God's image mandates taking seriously the breadth of human experience across time. Fea calls us to "see through God's eyes the people who have inhab-

John G. Turner teaches religious studies at George Mason University and is the author of Brigham Young: Pioneer Prophet.

ited this world—people with inherent dignity and worth." At the same time, the painful recognition of human sinfulness should preclude triumphalism.

Both Fea and Bendroth think that encounters with the past inculcate the virtues of humility and empathy. If we see ourselves as part of a chronologically extended human race, we may understand ourselves and others differently. "We may want to listen to [other people's] ideas," writes Fea, "empathize with them, and try to understand why they see the world the way they do." Bendroth posits that humility should follow from a recognition that those who lived in the past "are no worse and no better than us."

We are all bound both by our historical context and by our fallenness. Despite their imperfections, those who have preceded us may have a few things to teach us, or they may at least help us to grasp that some of the minor things over which we fight are no more important than the minor things over which former generations argued.

Bendroth encourages congregations to recognize that they are part of deeply rooted traditions, of long conversations across the generations about how to live out the Christian gospel. "The living," she maintains, "do not own the conversation any more than those past or those yet to come." It would help, she suggests, for us to overcome our Protestant biases and take seriously the affirmation in the Apostles' Creed of the "communion of saints."

Prior to the Reformation, Christians lived surrounded by a great cloud of witnesses from the past. They venerated their relics. They paid for masses to be performed on behalf of their ancestors. Protestant reformers dispensed with this ongoing work on behalf of the dead, and they reinterpreted the communion of the saints to mean the present church or congregation.

Bendroth does not suggest bringing back indulgences, but she encourages us to see ourselves as occupying only a small position within that great cloud of witnesses. Collectively, the communion of the saints points us to "the infinite array of personal experiences and convictions, talents and achievements, sins and failures that make up the human race across time and space." The spiritual practice of remembering requires us to use our memories and our imaginations.

So what are Christians to do with the good advice from these two muses? They should follow Fea's advice to examine aspects of the past that initially repel them. Fea tells of a student with progressive views who chose to write a thesis about Jerry Falwell and the rise of the Christian right. He also recounts the reactions of students who read the diaries and sermons of slaveholding American Christians. It is easier to devote ourselves to historical subjects that we like or imagine to be more like us. Fea reports that his students have cultivated their capacities for empathy and compassion and became "better Christians." Such encounters, Fea maintains, remind us that we are "imperfect creatures in need of improvement and redemption."

Bendroth's book is perfect in size and scope for adult education classes. Participants might reflect on their religious heritage and how it has shaped their place in today's church. As she notes, remembering involves more than organizing anniversary celebrations, publishing yearbooks, or hanging pictures of the church choirs on the walls. Churches need congregants who will tell stories about the life of the church, music directors who will provide the context for the composition of beloved hymns, and ministers who will incorporate the congregation's messy and complex history into sermons.

On communion Sundays, worship leaders might find ways to reflect on some of the myriad individuals who compose the "great cloud of witnesses" surrounding the Lord's Table. For Bendroth, remembering means reorienting one's perspective so that the life of the congregation revolves as much around the past and the future as the present.

Bendroth recommends some creative practices of congregational remembrance. She recalls an urban neighborhood that created homemade historical markers. Residents tacked their homemade plaques on buildings or street corners, recalling everything from beloved ancestors to past crimes. A congregation, she suggests, could undertake a similar project, identifying the meaning behind musty paintings, pieces of furniture, and life-changing sermons and rituals. Honest and open efforts would revive both euphoric and agonizing memories.

At a church in southern Alabama, the pastor loved telling a story about a confrontation at the church between a former white supremacist (and anti-Semite) and a Jewish man he had bullied as a youth. When they met each other after many decades, the victim forgave his old tormenter. They both shed tears as they experienced God's grace. The congregation repeatedly told the story of this "miracle."

We all have moments in our past that we can celebrate. Fea cautions that congregations should not be too quick to identify God's providence in their own histories. Such claims should always come with a "perhaps." Perhaps so. But perhaps it is even more important for congregations to keep their pasts alive. Future congregants will have ample opportunity for revisionism.

All churches—and all groups—have painful memories. How many predominantly white congregations regularly recall their past exclusion of or hostility toward African Americans? How many congregations preach about the greed or lust that caused their former senior pastor to stumble (and then quickly disappear from view)? How many churches keep alive memories of the fight over the color of the choir robes that split the congregation in two?

We need a steady diet of historical celebration and repentance. We need to remember the great things—at least in our limited understanding of God's providence—that God has done in our midst. Such memories sustain us in the midst of our present struggles. We also need to remember the ways that we have violated God's standards of justice and holiness. We need memories that will cause us to celebrate and to mourn, to repent and to reform, and, most of all, to help us remember God's steadfast love for the great communion of the saints across time.

CASE BY CASE

Politics in the pulpit?

BETSY WAS a pastor in a town with a growing Muslim population. For a while the new immigrants were not very visible, and they kept their religious practices to themselves. But then the community that

A pastor speaks out on an issue of interfaith hospitality.

gathered for Friday prayers in a community college classroom bought a piece of land off of the main thoroughfare, a quarter of a mile away from the bustling downtown, and hired architects to draw up plans for a modest mosque. The mosque would start out as a basic concrete block structure, but it would have room to expand.

When a neighborhood group heard about the plan, its members began doing everything that they could to stop the construction. When the group couldn't halt construction, it tried to make sure that the mosque stayed out of sight. The neighbors called for zoning laws that would limit certain types of architecture and require a large hedge to hide the building from the road.

Each morning, as Betsy scrolled through the news on her local paper's homepage, she cringed as she read the letters from people angry about the mosque. Betsy had been working with an interfaith group for over ten years, and she had never encountered the outright hostility that was being directed against the Muslim community.

She knew that things had become much more difficult for Muslims in the United States since 2001. At the interfaith meetings, a local imam had spoken of the discrimination Muslims faced. That discrimination seemed to be increasing as people heard about plans for the mosque. Some members of the mosque were denied a rental property. Muslim women became worried about wearing burqas because they had endured racist verbal attacks on the street erupting from passing cars. Girls had been pressured to take off their hijabs in school. Muslim children had been bullied at school, and when the parents complained, the administration didn't respond.

Sickened by what was happening in the community, Betsy longed to do something. That Sunday, the Gospel text was the story of the Good Samaritan. Betsy asked what the congregation's response should be to the person who had been beaten and left on the side of the road. She told of the difficulties that the Muslim community had endured over the decade and

explained how it was time for the congregation to show love and compassion for people who were different. Reviewing American history, Betsy elucidated how Catholics and Jews had been treated poorly and

said that Muslims were suffering the same plight. Betsy said that residents needed to have face-to-face conversations with the Muslims in the community. She also explained the meaning of separation between church and state and the need to safeguard religious liberties.

Since Betsy had always worked hard to work across interfaith lines and had made it clear that this was one of her core commitments, she didn't expect there would be any problems with her message in the congregation. But in the fellowship hall afterward she could feel the tension. Michael, a prominent member of the Chamber of Commerce, had his arms crossed as he talked with Anne, who owned a real estate agency. Michael said to Betsy, "Come on over here. We need to have a word with you."

When Betsy walked over, Anne started in. "When I come to church, I come to rest. I come to be refreshed. I come in order to have my batteries recharged, so I can face the rest of the week. I don't come here to hash out politics. We shouldn't have any politics in the pulpit."

"Politics? What do you mean?" asked Betsy.

"When you're up there, telling us what the city government should do, that's politics!" Michael said. "Talk about separation of church and state! Why should you stand up in the pulpit and preach about city zoning? Don't you think that violates the separation of church and state? It's almost every week. You preached about Jesus feeding the 5,000—a sermon which happened to coincide with Congress wanting to cut food assistance programs. There was the time when you declared that God is a God of peace—just when the country was considering an

Theresa F. Latini teaches practical theology and pastoral care at Western Theological Seminary. She is the author of The Church and the Crisis of Community: A Practical Theology of Small-Group Ministry and coauthor of Transforming Church Conflict: Compassionate Leadership in Action. The narrative was written by Carol Howard Merritt, author of Tribal Church.

attack in Syria. It's like you're making Jesus a pundit on MSNBC."

Anne explained, "I have to deal with these Muslims all week long at the office. It will destroy property values if they build a minaret in our downtown. This is such a headache for me. I certainly don't want to hear about this on Sunday morning.

"Islam is terrible in its treatment of women. These women walk around with head coverings. You have taught us so differently than that. Why would you want to protect such a demeaning practice? I have always looked up to you for defending women. I can't believe you would take Islam's side over Christianity, when they believe that women should submit like that."

Betsy was speechless. She hadn't expected to have this conversation.

A response by Theresa F. Latini

t one level, the conflict is theological. Betsy's well-developed theology of God's work in the world and the church's mission conflicts with the congregation's embedded theology—its implicit beliefs, assumptions, and faith practices. The Word and Spirit of God present in the preached moment have brought this conflict to the surface so that the congregation might see and participate in Christ's work anew.

As Betsy sees it, Christ exists in solidarity with—not separate from—this Muslim community. He suffers in and with those who are bullied, reviled, and harmed. And as Betsy sees it, the congregation, Christ's body, does not exist except in and with those who suffer. The congregation is bound together with this suffering community by virtue of (1) their mutual coexistence with Christ, (2) their common creaturely status, and (3) their religious vocation.

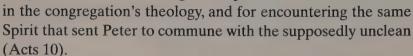
Christians and Muslims alike belong to God and therefore to one another. Christians and Muslims alike stand in need of God's grace. The Spirit empowers and sends Christians to participate in and work toward God's shalom in the world. As theologian Jack Stotts has explained, the core meaning of *shalom* "is that of wholeness, health, and security. Wholeness, health, and security do not mean individual tranquility in the midst of external turbulence. *Shalom* is not peace of mind, escape from the frustrations, and care of the surrounding environment. Rather, *shalom* is a particular state of social existence. It is a state of existence where the claims and needs of all are satisfied; where there is a relationship of communion between God and humans and nature, where there is fulfillment for all creation."

Betsy's congregants do not yet see the vulnerable Christ suffering in and with the Muslim community. Nor do they see the risen Christ overturning the tables of injustice. They do not yet know that their own spiritual and social well-being is bound up with that of the other community. They see Betsy's words and deeds as reflections of her "politics" rather than as a response to the demands of shalom.

Perhaps Betsy unwittingly has contributed to this understanding by emphasizing the church's ethical responsibility to

the neglect of helping the congregation discern the presence of the living Christ in and with the Muslim community.

In any case, the conflict between Betsy and her congregants opens up space for renewing the congregation's theological imagination, for addressing inadequacies



Just as the Spirit transformed Peter through his encounter with Cornelius, so transformation for Betsy, her congregants, and others will likely occur through encounters with members of the Muslim community. As a leader, Betsy can cultivate these encounters.

Good theology doesn't always penetrate a situation of high anxiety. Betsy will need a mixture of prophetic admonition, priestly listening, and sagely interpretation as she leads her congregation toward participation in God's shalom.

She might begin by listening deeply to herself—an important dimension of priestly leadership. She will bear the conflict of the community and the congregation, and conflict is an internal as well as external reality. Betsy's capacity to remain differentiated, not governed by others' demands, will depend on her continued spiritual and emotional renewal.

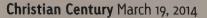
This renewal might include reminding herself as she leaves coffee hour to avoid globalizing the sentiments of Michael and Anne. Yes, they likely represent others in the church and community, but there's no indication they represent all or even the majority.

Along with careful listening comes wise interpreting. Embedded within Anne's criticism are longings for justice, equality, and wholeness for women; for a thriving community; and for some peace and rest in the midst of turmoil. Surely these are points where Betsy could begin to connect with Anne and others.

As for Michael, his understanding of Christian faith reflects both the differentiation of spheres of life characteristic of modernity and the highly polarized and polarizing political discourse so widespread in the United States. Michael, Anne, and others in the community likely are motivated by powerful images of Muslims as the enemy—inherently dangerous. Transforming these images is most likely to occur in personal and small group settings.

The challenge for Betsy is to resist the demonization of Muslims without slipping into despondency or disdain for those engaging in these behaviors. Becoming what we hate is an ever-present danger.

Soaring levels of discrimination and hate crimes against Muslims in the United States are well documented, making this story about Betsy and her congregants urgently applicable. Given the intertwined layers of conflict—personal, congregational, communal, global—played out on the backs of Muslims, a Christian leader will need to listen to God, self, and others; interpret the work of God's Spirit as well as the needs of humanity; and teach in a variety of settings, including worship, education classes, council meetings, and informal conversations. Trusting that the Spirit can use this conflict to transform violence into shalom will help sustain this labor of love.



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by Stephanie Paulsell

Journey stories

THIS SEMESTER I'm teaching a course on the literature of journey and quest with my colleague William Graham. The stories we read teach us, week after week, that there are things we cannot know about the possibilities our humanity holds until we detach ourselves from what is familiar and move into unknown territory. We follow in the footsteps of travelers who come back from their journeys with new information about what it means to be alive.

When we read the *Epic of Gilgamesh*, in which the hero travels to the ends of the earth searching for a solution to his mortality, Bill always tells our students a story about the teacher with whom he studied that tale. Bill describes his teacher reading aloud ancient hymns to the Mesopotamian gods—the corn gods and the rain gods, the gods of the mountains, and the gods of the marsh—with tears running down his face. These gods were profoundly linked to human needs that are the same now as they were millennia ago: the human need for a climate that sustains life, and for food and nourishment. With his tears, Bill's teacher acknowledged and honored the human needs that we share with everyone who's ever lived.

I've seen tears on Bill's face in the classroom as well. When he leads us through the journey of Moses and the people of Israel in the book of Exodus, he reads from the speech in which Martin Luther King Jr. compares himself to Moses on Mount Nebo, seeing the Promised Land but not knowing if he'll cross into it himself. Bill wants to show us how the Exodus journey has imprinted itself on other journeys, how its pattern continues to shape our own stories. His tears bear witness to the good news that these journey stories carry within them: that things do not have to be as they are; that new forms of community can come into being; that the world can change.

In his Confessions, St. Augustine berated his boyhood self for weeping over the death of Dido when he read the Aeneid but remaining dry-eyed over the story of Christ's passion. As many readers have noted, Augustine was awfully hard on his young self. Even C. S. Lewis, reflecting on his own childhood, acknowledged that it was "so hard to feel as one was told one ought to feel about God or the sufferings of Christ." Augustine thought he had wept over the wrong story. But perhaps he tried too hard to keep those stories separate. The human desire to transcend the circumstances of our lives and the human experience of being made vulnerable by love that are reflected in Virgil's story are by no means alien to the Christian one.

If you're looking for a new way to enter the Lenten journey this year, add a journey story to your Lenten reading. Follow Gilgamesh to the ends of the earth or the Knights of the Round Table into trackless parts of the forest. Follow Teresa of Ávila into the interior castle or Shusaku Endo's pilgrims to the banks of the Ganges. Follow the Buddha as he leaves the comfort of his father's palace or Haiku poet Bashō as he travels to the deep north of Japan. Follow Virginia Woolf's characters to the lighthouse or Cormac McCarthy's father and son in *The Road*, as they move across the ashy landscape of postapocalyptic America.

The story of Jesus is a unique story. It is the gospel, the good news. But like the incarnation itself, it draws its power not only from its uniqueness but also from being a story among other stories. By the time it reaches us, the story of Jesus' 40 days in the desert and the story of his journey toward Jerusalem are resonant with echoes from earlier narratives: Elijah's journey

The Lenten journey invites us to step out into a disorienting space.

to Mount Horeb, the journey of the people of Israel through the wilderness, the journey of Abraham and Isaac up Mount Moriah, the journey of humanity out of paradise and into the contingent world. In turn, the story of Jesus patterns many of the stories that come later and shines its light on them.

During Lent we seek to have Jesus' story provide the pattern for our lives. The Lenten journey invites us to detach ourselves from the habits and comforts that protect and sustain our status quo and to step out into a disorienting space. This is where Gilgamesh goes about mourning in the skin of a lion. It's the obscure wood in which Dante wakes up. It's the desert in which the people of Israel wander. The anthropologists call this liminal space, where our perspective can shift, where we become vulnerable to transformation, and where new forms of being and living may be discovered.

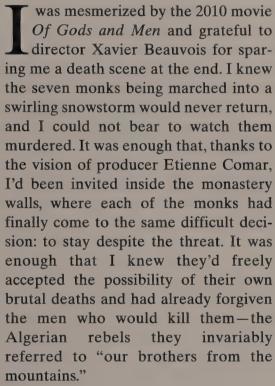
Jesus invites us into this liminal space, a space he explored to its very limits. Placing his story next to the stories of others whose humanity he shared illuminates the radical possibilities of our shared human journey.

Stephanie Paulsell teaches at Harvard Divinity School.

Review

Of monks and men

by Paula Huston



Only later did I allow myself to wonder about that unfilmed scene. Were the monks held captive for weeks or months before dying? Were they able to maintain their vows in the midst of such terror? When death finally came, was it quick or did they suffer? And what about the two who were spared—were they racked by relentless survivor's guilt?

Freddy Derwahl provides at least some of the answers. As a prospective monk at the Algerian Trappist monastery of Tibhirine, Derwahl had come to know both the community and the monks nearly ten years before the 1996 abduction. In July 2011 Derwahl went to a monastery in Morocco to visit Brother Jean-Pierre Schumacher, one of the two Tibhirine monks who were not killed. He stayed in the monastery there for some weeks, reacquainting himself with the

quiet rhythms of a life he had ultimately not chosen, participating in the daily schedule of worship and prayer, and spending hours in conversation with the 87-year-old Jean-Pierre.

During their first meeting in nearly 25 years, Derwahl found the elderly monk "in good spirits," wearing an "impish smile that concealed great kindness." Wise, serene, and seemingly unburdened by the horrors of the past, Jean-Pierre took him to a small room dedicated to the memory of his seven brothers. Their portraits hung on the wall above a seven-armed lamp, and a copy of Prior Christian de Chergé's famous last testament sat on a podium nearby. Jean-Pierre is now the last of the Tibhirine community; the other survivor, Brother Amédée, died several years ago, and Jean-Pierre believes it is both his privilege and his responsibility to recount the legendary story from his own monastic and insider perspective.

Along with recording that story, giving a historical overview of the Algerian political developments that led to civil war, and filling in many of the biographical blanks left by the movie, Derwahl keeps a spiritual journal of his own. His entries, along with the evocative color photographs of the monasteries of Midelt and Tibhirine by Bruno Zanzoterra, go some way toward making sense of the mystery of martyrdom. For example, one night when he was trying and failing to sleep because of the constantly barking dogs outside the monastery walls, Derwahl wondered whether the monks might have found a depth of faith no longer experienced in the West: "As I reflect on the men who sleep in this



The Last Monk of Tibhirine:
A True Story of Martyrdom,
Faith, and Survival
By Freddy Derwahl
Paraclete, 200 pp., \$21,99 paperback

house, I realize they are serious, yet relaxed... There is nothing they have not endured. This is a completely different kind of Christianity than we encounter in old Europe."

Certainly the words of those who died lend credence to this speculation. Prior Christian, fully aware of how dangerous their situation had become, wrote his last testament two years before the abduction. In it, he assured his family and friends that he did not want to die, much less seek martyrdom. The death of a martyr, he explained, extracts far too high a price afterward: there is always a murderer who will be blamed and who will have to live with his own guilt. But knowing that he would almost certainly face a violent end, Christian concluded his letter with a loving message to the "friend of my last moment who does not know what you are doing," expressing the fond hope that the two of them, victim and murderer, will see one another again in Paradise, "like the fortunate thieves" who were crucified on either side of Christ.

At the end of the book, Derwahl leads us gently but inexorably through the scenes the movie did not show—the several months of captivity in the mountains, the recording of Christian's

Paula Huston's latest book is A Land Without Sin: A Novel (Slant).

voice released by the rebels as they negotiated for an exchange of prisoners, the abrupt decision of the French government not to deal with the terrorists after all, and the subsequent decapitations of the seven. By the time we get to this chapter, we are more than prepared for the worst—and surprisingly unsurprised by Jean-Pierre's calm, loving response to the news of his brothers' murders. When a young novice begins to weep, Jean-Pierre takes him into his arms and says, "Don't be sad. What has happened here is something amazing, and we have to live up to the greatness of it."

Like so many others, I found Of Gods and Men to be one of the most powerful movies I've ever seen. I am grateful to Freddy Derwahl for his beautifully paced, profoundly reflective, and spiritually moving portrait of monasticism at its most heroic. In our sometimes cynical and despairing era, this book shines like the star-studded sky over Tibhirine.

Approaching the End: Eschatological Reflections on Church, Politics, and Life

By Stanley Hauerwas Eerdmans, 269 pp., \$24.00 paperback

Stanley Hauerwas, who recently retired from Duke Divinity School, identifies himself as first and foremost a teacher. After 45 years of teaching ethics and theology, he considers his major contribution to be helping the church think through the loss of Christendom. I would add that in the process, Hauerwas has made it clear that the church's loss of power in this new age is a good thing.

Because Hauerwas spends little time bemoaning the church's decline in membership and loss of legitimacy in the eyes of culture, his writing is refreshing. In an

Reviewed by Clay Thomas, pastor of Rivermont Presbyterian Church, Chattanooga, Tennessee.





age in which ecclesial leaders are inundated with suggestions on how to repair or reform the church for the 21st century, he seems a little less anxious about the times than most of us. His arguments are not weakened by the "epistemological crisis" the church is going through as it is trapped between irreconcilable means and ends.

Hauerwas's Approaching the End is neatly divided into three sections: on theological matters, church and politics, and life and death. In keeping with his life's work, Hauerwas takes on the modern sacrificial state, the privatization and domestication of religion, and the nature of suffering. He also says that his book is about learning how to die and training to be human.

Broadly speaking, it is a book about time and purpose—or, better said, the purpose of time. I would hesitate to suggest that *end* is a double entendre. Eschatology does not so easily divide telos and time. According to Hauerwas, the church's eschatological end is to be an alternative

politic so the world might recognize itself and a place where Christ's lordship is operative and visible. He states that our purpose as the body of Christ "is to live lives that point to Christ—lives that are unintelligible if the one they follow is not the Son of God." Our true end is to inhabit the new vision inaugurated by Christ.

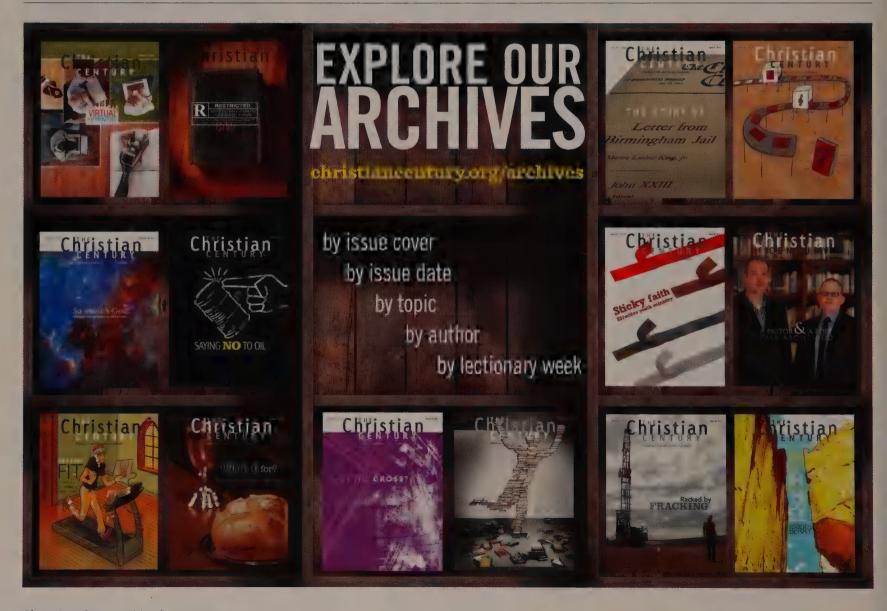
In his essay on habits, inspired by Thomas Aquinas's locution "wayfarers who are on a journey of the soul to God," Hauerwas describes our ultimate end as "friendship with God." Whereas Aristotle identified virtues as a means to the good life and happiness, Hauerwas says that virtues are not ends but the means to "be in service to growth in human friendship with God."

For Hauerwas, a kerygmatic theologian and self-proclaimed theocrat, friendship with God as an end seems a little casual. In contrast to the "friendly end," Hauerwas also draws heavily from Karl Barth—who understood that our purpose as covenanted partners is to live in grateful obedience for the gift of life, a

gift that is simply on loan and belongs to God. In his essay "Doing Nothing Gallantly," Hauerwas writes:

For Aristotle, happiness must be complete and self-sufficient and must finally be under our control. For Barth, ... the joy that makes our lives worth living comes as a gift not under our control. "To be out of control" is what it means to learn to live eschatologically.

Hauerwas emphasizes throughout his essays that the ends of the church are pursued in eschatological time. On the one hand, the Christian life is one of patience and deference to God's timing; on the other hand, the Christian life will lose its apocalyptic edge if eschatology remains an ideal relegated to the future. In fact, without the ability to see history doxologically, the telos set before us would lead us to despair. We cannot, after all, measure friendship with God or the degree to which our lives are unintelligible. Nonetheless, Hauerwas asserts



that time has a plot. He writes, "We believe we come from a past that will find its fulfillment in the future. Time has a narrative logic, which means that time is not just one damn thing after another."

If all politics are local and church is an alternative politic, it is not surprising that Hauerwas identifies the local church as the hub for authentic transformation. The only way to know God, after all, is for one person to tell another the story. Borrowing from John Howard Yoder, he points to the faith of members of the seemingly insignificant early church. Their declaration of Jesus as Lord could not be evidenced by power, but by their embodiment of cruciform love they served as a witness to the power of Christ's rule and became effectively a local "politic of persuasion." Even in his essay on ecumenism, Hauerwas identifies the locus of the visibility of oneness as where Christians live and go to church. While much academic energy is being devoted to new and better strategies to rebuild vibrant institutions, Hauerwas is content to prescribe radical discipleship as the simple, yet difficult, way forward.

Perhaps the most stimulating assertion Hauerwas makes is that Christians are to live in a manner that would be unintelligible if Jesus were not the Son of God. In his own life, Hauerwas has been successful at that in more than one way. His pacifism and embrace of suffering baffle the majority of both Christians and non-Christians who become acquainted with it.

Unfortunately, however, his propensity for intertwining antiquities, present-day philosophy, and theology will likely confound and frustrate sympathetic readers. Ironically, Hauerwas laments

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the Baconian creation of an invisible realm of science and art that robs laity of a shared conceptual vocabulary. The patient's inability to communicate with the physician often leads to misdiagnosis. If, as Hauerwas suggests, the local church is the seat of transformation and in need of repair, it seems to me that it would be worthwhile for the teacher to take a dose of his own medicine and "make it plain."

Nonetheless, the church needs Hauerwas's prophetic witness. His theology is courageous, challenging, and a source of hope when many ecclesial leaders seem to be despairing. The church needs theologians like Hauerwas, who make bold claims without arrogance and desire to stay in dialogue with their detractors. His attention to suffering, violence, and disability keeps unpleasant subjects at the forefront. This book is for ecclesial leaders who have an appetite for metaconversations on suffering, virtues, and the church as an alternative politic.



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The Good Lord Bird: A Novel By James McBride Riverhead, 432 pp., \$27.95

I didn't want to review this book. I just wanted to enjoy it. At every turn, it resisted my attempts to analyze it and replaced my literary critic's instincts with laughter, pleasure, and suspense.

The Good Lord Bird, last year's National Book Award winner, is a tale of the antebellum South perhaps like none you've ever heard. A young slave living in the contested territory of Kansas, Henry Shackleford, is liberated by John Brown, who will later try to ignite a slave revolution by attacking Harper's Ferry in what is then Virginia. Because the 11-year-old boy is small, has a beautiful face, and is wearing a potato sack, Brown believes him to be a girl and takes the boy's father's dying words, "Henry ain't a . . ." to be "Henrietta." (This "is how the Old Man's mind worked. Whatever he

believed, he believed. It didn't matter to him whether it was really true or not. He just changed the truth till it fit him. He was a real white man.") For the next three years, Henry is known as Henrietta or, in Brown's affectionate terms, Little Onion, whom Brown believes to be his good luck charm. Onion travels with Brown as he fights the Pro Slavers in Kansas, raises money and support back east, and prepares his doomed raid on Harper's Ferry.

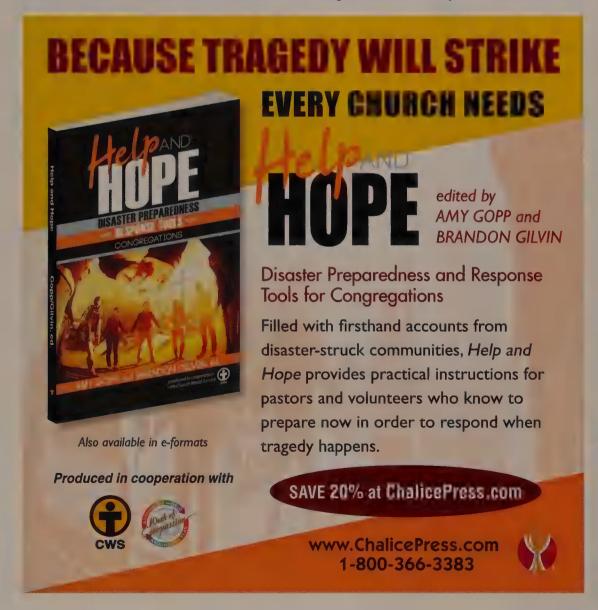
The story is told in Little Onion's irreverent yet innocent voice. From the beginning Onion says that he doesn't want to be in Brown's ragtag army and that at any moment he will break free and run away. But the charade goes on so long that Henry becomes some piece of Henrietta, and the affection that Onion has for John Brown also grows more real.

In Onion's early hours in Brown's company, Brown gives him a dress and a bonnet to put on to replace the potato sack he had been wearing when he was "liberated." Onion's ambivalence about his position is conveyed with the humor

that pervades the tale: "Ain't no way in God's kingdom was I gonna put on that dress and bonnet. Not in no way, shape, form or fashion was I gonna do it. But my arse was on the line, and while it's a small arse, it do cover my backside and thus I am fond of it. Plus, he was an outlaw and I was his prisoner."

One of the many remarkable things about this book is the way that historical figures step in and out of the story. McBride satirizes the revered Frederick Douglass with such acuity that it may send readers scrambling to their history books to find out why. Harriet Tubman appears as a transcendent figure, with the power to shame and inspire people into action. "The wind seemed to live in that woman's face. Looking at her was like staring at a hurricane," Onion says. Meanwhile, Brown is depicted as part crazy, part loving, part visionary, not afraid to decapitate people in the name of slavery's demise, but gentle with a mouse and with "every animal under God's creation."

While Henry lives as Henrietta, he





continues to look for means of escape, but he also keeps choosing to return. Onion's moral development, as a child out only for himself to one who has real love for the company he keeps, is central to this picaresque. When Onion betrays his companions, he grapples with his choices and tries to right his wrongs. His desire to be free of Brown's mission never leaves him, but it becomes tempered by experience and challenged by circumstance. Onion is a reluctant participant in history, and yet he stays to the very end.

As the attack on Harper's Ferry unfolds, Onion thinks his religious conversion has finally come and has something to do with his praying instead of running, or with his choosing to pray as his options dwindle. His conversion prayer begins, "Lord, 'scuse me a minute. I has not had a high tolerance for the Word before but." That is as far as he gets before Brown exclaims, "Precious Jesus! Onion has discovered Thee! Success is at hand." But Onion's real conversion happens when he chooses to reenter the fray,

to stand with those who have loved him even in folly and failure.

McBride notes in almost every one of his characters how the institution of slavery "twisted" the people "all kinds of different ways." In the mouth of Harriet Tubman, McBride comes the closest to commentary on the present moment: "I expect it'll happen in all our tomorrows, too, for when you slave a person, you slave the one in front and the one behind." McBride knows that the violence and oppression of slavery is not something that can be wiped away with one man's avenging sword, as John Brown would have it. It lives in us-and in our "tomorrows" we have to attend to it. The Good Lord Bird makes fun of one of America's saddest chapters, but it is proof that satire can be a healing and humanizing activity, rich and deep-that it can tell us how we came to be who we are and how we need to free ourselves from slavery's long reach.

Reviewed by Amy Frykholm, CENTURY associate editor.



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Why the Germans? Why the Jews? Envy, Race Hatred, and the Prehistory of the Holocaust

By Götz Aly Metropolitan Books, 304 pp., \$30.00

Aly addresses one of the most troubling and enduring questions of the 20th century: How could the German nation kill 6 million Jews? Aly's explanation points more toward class and ethnic resentment than religious difference. Jews took much better advantage than gentiles did of the economic opportunities provided by the Industrial Revolution. Jews were more committed to the education of their young than were non-Jews. Growing resentment of their advancement in society came to a head after the German defeat in World War I and the humiliating terms of the Treaty of Versailles. Powerless to get back at their external enemies. Germans looked for a scapegoat.

Living Thoughtfully, Dying Well: A Doctor Explains How to Make Death a Natural Part of Life

By Glen E. Miller Herald Press, 180 pp., \$12.99 paperback

Miller, an internist, has coronary heart disease. A survivor of a number of heart incidents, he decided to become proactive about his life so that, to the degree possible, he could have a good death. For him, a good death is one in which he maintains his privacy and dignity, has a sense of control over events, dies in a way which reflects the way he's lived, creates loving memories for his family, reduces the endof-life costs, and dies at home. As it turns out, dying well means living well: working at relationships that matter, giving attention to one's spiritual life, serving others, and putting in place things like a living will. Miller brings to this topic a lifetime of experience as a doctor, including time assisting Mother Teresa in India. He also brings a theological education and the perspectives of both a hospital administrator and a patient.

on Media

Goin' nowhere

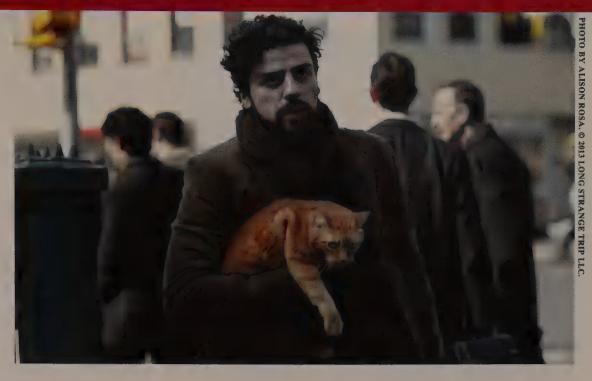
ilmmakers Ethan and Joel Coen can entertain you with comedy (O Brother, Where Art Thou, Raising Arizona) or leave you gasping with their vision of the meaninglessness of life (No Country for Old Men, A Serious Man). Their film Inside Llewyn Davis mixes these two tendencies, but with the darkness far more determinative than the light.

The film is based loosely on 1960s Greenwich Village folksinger Dave Van Ronk. Llewyn Davis (played by Oscar Isaac) lives a decidedly unromantic existence as a starving artist. He goes from couch to couch, lodging with family and friends, then with friendly acquaintances and finally with strangers, alienating one after the other. He hauls along his guitar and a box of his records that he can't sell. In one scene, he slides the box of records under a table until it bumps into something: an almost identical box of LPs that his host has and also can't sell.

Davis is a good musician, but there are thousands like him, and they can't all succeed. More than skill and hard work is required. Luck, sex appeal, and commercial savvy play a role, and Llewyn has none of those.

The Coens have wryly joked that this film seems to have no plot so they added a cat. An unremarkable tabby escapes from the apartment of one of Llewyn's few well-heeled friends. He locks himself out of the house while chasing it and then carries the feline all over Manhattan. It jumps through the fire escape at another patron's dumpy apartment, and Llewyn spends the next few scenes searching for it. By the end of the film, the cat has wandered about a hundred blocks back to its owner. Llewyn finally learns that the cat's name is Ulysses.

The Coens are geniuses at echoing classic texts unpretentiously. Even those



DAY IN THE LIFE: Oscar Isaac portrays Llewyn Davis, a folksinger who can't seem to get a break.

who haven't read James Joyce's classic novel know it chronicles one day in the life of an ordinary Dubliner, with all his major and minor catastrophes and brilliant and humdrum thoughts. *Ulysses* has no plot, nor does *Inside Llewyn Davis*. Nor do many lives.

Llewyn is not a particularly nice guy. He blasts a couple who take him in when they ask him to play his music for them, accusing them of turning his profession into a parlor game: "This is my job. This is how I pay the bills." The irony, of course, is that he is homeless and unable to pay his bills. In one particularly bleak moment he takes to heckling a fellow folksinger on stage: "Show us your panties!" he yells at the older woman. It is hard not to cheer for her husband when he beats up Llewyn in the alley.

Carey Mulligan perfectly plays a folksinger named Mary who seems to be in the movie for no greater reason than to glare at Llewyn and bark "Asshole!" He can't even conduct a sordid affair with her properly. He has to ask Mary's boyfriend for a loan to cover an abortion of a child that may not be his. "Everything you touch turns to shit," Mary growls. And it's hard to object.

As Llewyn leaves the stage for the last time in the film, a young Bob Dylan ascends it, harmonica at the ready, his growly voice singing a song nearly identical to the one Llewyn just performed. As Llewyn heads to that alley to get his

ass kicked, Dylan explodes into the pantheon of musical immortals. The humor here is dark indeed.

But Llewyn still calls forth our sympathies. He has a fondness for the cat, or at least for the people whose cat he lost. He is crestfallen when his car hits a dog. He tries to do right by those who help him; he just fails with remarkable regularity. As he steps into a snow puddle on a doomed pilgrimage to Chicago for a hoped-for audition and then tries to dry his socks at a diner, we feel for him. He's not a bad guy, nor a particularly good one either—just a poor schlub trying to make his way in a largely indifferent world.

The Coen brothers are never indifferent to a film's setting. They make the Gaslight Café in the Greenwich Village of the 1960s look smoky, desperate, and musically intoxicating. The subway stations whip by faster than Llewyn's missed opportunities. The walkups and condos of Manhattan are perfect—one soulcrushing hallway narrows to a razor's edge and two doors appear like pincers, suggesting the end point for a sputtering career. This New York is drained of color and perpetually wintry—a place where some dreams are realized but most just go to seed.

The author is Jason Byassee, senior pastor at Boone United Methodist Church in Boone, North Carolina.



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GLOBAL CHURCH

In the land of Zomia

ne of the most successful denominations in my homeland of Wales was the Calvinistic Methodists. (Yes, I know that sounds like an oxymoron.) In the 19th century, these Methodists launched missionary work among the Mizo people in northeastern India and were so effective that today almost 90 percent of the Mizos are Christian. In 2006 the flourishing Mizo church began returning the favor-it sent two missionaries to reconvert Wales.

Any account of modern Asian Christianity must deal with minority peoples like the Mizo, who long occupied a marginal status in the European empires and the postimperial states. Such groups are sometimes labeled "tribal," which encourages us to dismiss them as primitive and irrelevant. Recently, though, scholars have devised a new category for these minorities, and their work is extraordinarily valuable for understanding the history of Christian mission.

In 2002 Dutch historian Willem van Schendel noticed the broad similarities that united minority peoples spread across vast tracts of south and southeast Asia, even though these groups had no direct connections to each other. These peoples usually lived in remote or upland areas and were separated from the great mainstream civilizations of the lowlands for reasons of language, religion, social organization, and economic life. Examples of such peoples would include

India's Nagas and Mizos, the Hmong of Vietnam and Laos, and the Karen and Chin in Myanmar. Taking a Tibeto-Burman name for a barbarous highlander, *zomi*, van Schendel suggested that all these peoples belonged to a region he christened "Zomia."

The exact limits of this land are still debated. (Are Tibetans Zomians?) But even a modest estimate gives Zomia an area of a million square miles, one third the size of the continental United States. This country that never was has a population of more than a hundred million.

Zomia has played a critical role in Asia's Christian history. Across that continent, Western Christians repeatedly found the same obstacles to successful mission. Mainstream societies were highly resistant to Christianity because older structures of state and social organization survived hardily under colonial rule, and these were thoroughly intertwined with great literate faiths like Buddhism or Hinduism. Slow to make much impression on the mainstream, missionaries turned instead to people on the fringes of society who found themselves despised and excluded. In India, missionaries looked both to lowcaste populations and to ancient tribal groups, the Adivasis. Throughout Asia, missionary eyes lifted up unto the hills to seek out Zomians.

After the empires ended, modern missionary ventures

sought out the same potential converts, often in the name of Christianizing unreached peoples. These later efforts were made possible by air travel and radio broadcasts.

In some areas (by no means all), Christian efforts achieved staggering results. The first church in Nagaland dates only from 1872, but today, 95 percent of Nagas describe themselves as Christian (mainly Baptist). The name of the Kuki people literally means "wild tribes." But today a thriving Kuki Christian Church claims over a million members. Perhaps a quarter of Myanmar's Karen people are Christian, belonging to a broad spectrum of denominations. Chins are mostly Baptist.

French efforts in Indo-China created a sizable Catho-lic presence, especially among the elites; but it was left to later Protestants to evangelize the region's Zomians. Over half of Vietnam's Protestants come from tribal groups such as the Hmong and Hroi.

Despite their extreme diversity, these people share certain common features in their Christian faith. Not being from literate backgrounds, they encounter the practice of reading at the same time they encounter Christian scriptures. To be a Christian is to read. This gives immense power to the concept of scriptural authority and the written

word. Zomian readers readily identify with many biblical themes that are easily lost on Westerners, not least the notion of Jesus the Galilean as an upland outsider scorned in sophisticated Jerusalem.

In politics, Zomian Christians share a heavy burden of persecution, which is in large part politically driven. Because of the difficult terrain in which these groups live, ethnic and tribal boundaries correspond poorly with the state boundaries drawn on maps. Besides their homeland in China's province of Yunnan, for instance, Lisu people are found in Myanmar, Thailand, and India. Such border crossing alarms and infuriates modern regimes, who see their hill peoples as potential sources of separatism and organized criminality.

Not surprisingly, states and armies are particularly nervous about any ideologies that they associate with the hill peoples, especially when (as with Christianity) these are associated with Western foreigners. Much of the persecution we hear about in China, Vietnam, and Myanmar is targeted against what I have called the Zomians.

Although a recent invention, the concept of Zomia supplies an excellent lens for observing a complex and stirring part of modern Christian history.

Philip Jenkins's latest book is The Great and Holy War: How World War I Became a Religious Crusade.

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DIRECTOR-The Common Ministry of Pullman seeks an innovative, energetic, and entrepreneurial individual to lead an interfaith ministry for students on the campus of Washington State University. Responsibilities include active involvement in programs of faith inquiry and development in the WSU community, providing compassionate care to the community, fostering relationships, and networking with a wide variety of faith-based, secular, and community groups. The director reports to the Common Ministry Council, partnering with the council to envision, plan, and implement the future of the Common Ministry. The director supervises the office manager. Requirements include an advanced theological degree or equivalent degree, experience working with young adults and interfaith communities, and effective communication skills. The director's salary package, including housing, medical, and retirement benefits, is based on experience, work record, and depth of skills. To apply, send cover letter, résumé, and contact information for three references to: Common Ministry at WSU/ Interfaith House, 720 NE Thatuna, Pullman, WA 99163. E-mail: office@interfaith-house.com. Electronic submissions are preferred. Review of applications will begin on March 31, 2014, and will continue until the position is filled. Common Ministry website: www.interfaith-house.com.

SUBMISSIONS

If you would like to write an article for the CENTURY, please send a query to submissions@christiancentury.org or to Submissions, The Christian Century, 104 S. Michigan Ave., Suite 1100, Chicago, IL 60603. Allow four to six weeks for a response from our editors. We do not consider unsolicited manuscripts for our regular columns or book reviews.

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If you've moved or are planning to move, please let us know.

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Please allow six to eight weeks for an address change to become effective.

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If you're over sixty, or black and over forty, you are at high risk for glaucoma.

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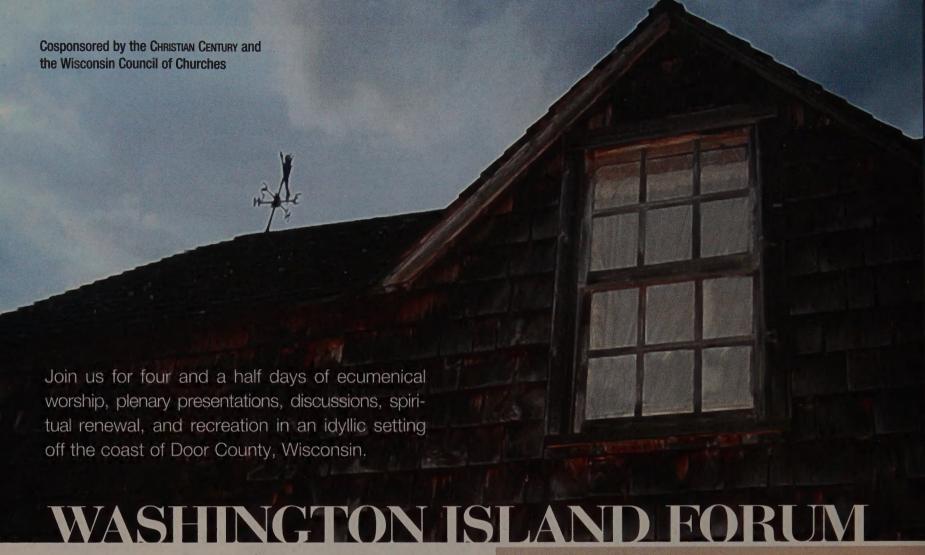
Art



Diptych / A Spiritual House (digital laminate to black aluminum), by Deborah Risa Mrantz

Deborah Risa Mrantz, founder of Guildworks iAbraham Ministries, works with socially conscious artists at the converging planes of Abrahamic traditions. Influenced by urban design, street-art sensibilities, and modern typography, she develops scripture-based art using repurposed materials. Mrantz's works speak of "a world being repaired and made beautiful again."

Art selection and comment by Lil Copan, a painter and editor in Boston.



Twenty Questions

Why the Church Needs to Ask More Questions Than It Answers

with Lillian Daniel & Martin B. Copenhaver

Jesus asked eight times as many questions as he answered. And yet, the church is stereotyped in our culture as an institution that believes it has the answers. Could Christians embrace the teaching methods Jesus used and ask more questions than we answer?

Tuesday: What questions did Jesus ask?

Wednesday: How do questions extend conversation? **Thursday:** Why does the church answer questions

June 23-27, 2014

no one is asking?

Friday: How do we follow an inquisitive Savior

into the future?

The week begins with a welcome and opening picnic Monday afternoon. Tuesday through Thursday morning there are worship and workshop sessions, followed by optional afternoon discussion groups. Friday begins with a Eucharist, followed by a final workshop and discussion, with departure at noon.

Registration: \$275

The Rev. Lillian Daniel is the author of the 2013 book When Spiritual But Not Religious Is Not Enough: Seeing God in Surprising Places, Even the Church. She has served as the senior minister of the First Congregational Church, Glen Ellyn, Illinois, since 2004.





The Rev. **Martin B. Copenhaver** is author of the 2013 book *Living Faith while Holding Doubts*. He has been senior pastor of Wellesley Congregational Church in Massachusetts since 1994 and has been named president-elect of Andover Newton Theological School.

Daniel and Copenhaver coauthored This Odd and Wondrous Calling: The Public and Private Lives of Two Ministers.